

HERE I AM

THE PATH FROM PSYCHOSIS AND
DEPRESSION TO THE LIGHT

MAY-MAY MEIJER

MISSION WORLD PEACE

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ISBN: 9789083127514 (ebook)

ISBN: 9789083127507 (paperback)

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Front cover: Photo of May-May Meijer by Yvonne van den Bergh

Publisher: Mission World Peace

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You are welcome to share this information in order to help people with a vulnerability for psychosis and depression and/or to contribute to world peace.
For: A World in Which All Children Can Play. Please be aware of the trees and the environment (don't waste paper) and inform the author.

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PRAISE FOR HERE I AM

“People have the intuition to consult sources located outside accessible conscious experience. Not everyone can intuit in this fashion, but it is evidently part of the human repertoire.”

- Jim van Os, Full Professor of Psychiatry and chairman of the Division of Neuroscience, University Medical Center Utrecht (UMC Utrecht)

“Rarely have I seen someone describe what it is like to have a psychosis as well as May-May Meijer, I read the book *Here I Am* in one breath and have learned a lot from it. For anyone who wants to know more about psychosis sensitivity; *Here I Am* is a must-read!”

- Henk Driessen, Anoiksis, The Dutch association for people with psychosis vulnerability

“May-May has the courage to show her vulnerability by telling us about her psychiatric process and her encounter with Christ. There are very few people who dare to do this, she is a kind of apostle.”

- Father Dresmé, Pastor of the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Vitus and St. Willibrord in Hilversum

“May-May herself has transformed those two core values she received in her psychoses - peace and love - into real action. She founded the Peace SOS Foundation with a few like-minded people, an international peace organization of which she is chair. ‘Towards a world where all children can play’ is its motto.”

- Margaretha Coornstra, Nederlands Dagblad

“You are a candle and light for the world.”

- Shams Alkhateeb, mother of Noor and Alaa, talking to May-May during the bombardments of Eastern Ghouta in Syria.

For everyone who is in need of love

A mother's love! What can this be compared with!

Of all the things on this earth, this love comes closest to the divine love in heaven.

Mother love means a life full of dedication – and sometimes the sacrifice of a life –

whereby just a single thought, a single hope, and a single feeling exists;

that her children grow up to become healthy and strong, free of any evil habits, and able to look after themselves.

Anonymous

PREFACE

Here I Am – the sequel to my earlier book *Inner Voices* – is an account of the many years I spent struggling with my situation after my first compulsory admission. It is about my fight with being divorced, about missing my son – who I hardly saw during the periods I was ill – my struggle with medication, and my years-long suffering from depression after my psychosis in 2009. *Here I Am* is also very much about a new psychotic episode and my second compulsory admission. A nurse on the open ward of the Rembrandthof mental hospital asked herself the question out loud: ‘Why do patients stop taking their medication even after suffering a relapse?’ This book provides an insight into this issue and covers the period from around 2010 up till 2014.

I feel that it is important for me to write this book, that it is something that God also wants. I hope that when I tell this powerful truth, that it will resonate throughout the universe. That this story will radiate right up to the cosmos. I don’t know how exactly, it’s just what I feel. During my psychoses, I had the idea that ‘speaking the truth’ was a value in itself, perhaps also because I felt at the time that I couldn’t or wasn’t allowed to. Now still, I am convinced that a more peaceful world will come about – and

hopefully it will contribute to world peace – if I let others know what I experienced during my psychosis. And I especially hope that *Here I Am* can also help other people with a vulnerability for psychosis, their loved ones and caregivers. I believe it is good, for example, that more attention is paid within Western psychiatry to the spiritual side of psychoses, and to the feeling that you are in contact with God, but also to the feeling that there are spirits inside your body. Even though the need to talk about it or do something about it may differ from patient to patient. It is a delicate subject, with some patients – for example Thier on PsychoseNet – indicating that they are pleased that the caregivers do *not* go into the content of their psychoses.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, if the individual with a vulnerability for psychosis wishes to ‘do something’ with the spiritual side of their psychosis after experiencing it, this can not only help the individual in their development, but can also contribute to a more loving world.

If you yourself suffer from depression or a psychosis, I hope you find recognition in this book and gain strength from it to aid recovery. Be aware that you are unique and that you matter. There are probably more people who love you than you think. You are allowed to love yourself as the person you are now. Take what you can from this book, and feel free to put it to one side if it is too much, or ask for help.

I want to paint as true a picture as possible of my depression and psychosis. However, to make my story read easily, I have written it as a running narrative. I have added a few things here and there when I didn’t know how else to express myself. I have merged the huge numbers of patients, nurses and psychiatrists I met into several characters. I have also occasionally taken steps ‘to protect’ people. I have as much as possible tried to stick to the truth but at the same time I do not want to put anybody in an embarrassing situation.

I also hope that with *Here I Am*, I can make clear to people who are not familiar with depression and/or psychosis what a person who suffers from depression and psychosis goes through; that it becomes clear that you suffer and that as a result your world becomes smaller, and that a little love or care can make a huge difference. My younger sister, for example, who phoned me practically every day to listen to my 'stories', so that I could express my grief. Or when a nurse prepared a sandwich for me so that I could see my son immediately when he came round during visiting hours. I will be eternally grateful to them for what they have done. And there are also countless other examples of loving care included in this book.

With *Here I Am*, I want on the one hand to show that I have reasonably recovered, and on the other hand, I want to show that Christ has asked me to serve others and that I want to be here for you. I have the feeling that Christ has shown me a little piece of the world as He sees it – *everything lives* – and that it is valuable and important to share it. However, world peace is something that we can only achieve together, all of us.

For my recovery, I am first and foremost extremely grateful to my son, my loving sister, and my father and mother. They have always stood by my side. I am also very grateful to their partners, the psychiatrists, including Mariëlle van Burik (my most recent psychiatrist at the Rembrandthof), the social-psychiatric nurses, including Jaap van den Top (my last social-psychiatric nurse at the Rembrandthof), the therapists, the cleaners, the odd-job man and all the rest of the staff at the Rembrandthof, my other family members and friends, fellow patients and all the other people who appear in this book and who have helped me get through my difficult years. How fine too that they want to help to provide more openness about psychosis and depression. I thank the father of my son and his partner from the bottom of my heart for the fact that, despite everything, we do our best together to be there for our son. I am also thankful that Noah has such a lovey bonus sister and bonus brother. I also want to thank everyone who is spreading the

message of peace. I consider myself fortunate that within Peace SOS, as well as within other parties I meet, there is room for my psychological vulnerability and neurodiversity.

My thanks go too to Liesbeth Heenk, who helped me to publish *Here I Am*. She is a strong-minded woman who champions the cause of Holocaust survivors and also gives me a voice in the world. I thank Kumar Jamdagni warmly for his meticulous way of working on the translation and for his love of the English language. Thanks too to Juliëtte Tews, who fine-tuned the Dutch manuscript with pleasure, attention and love. To the printer, the reviewers of the draft version, including Maryse Lamme, the people of the Sint Vituskerk, and all the others indirectly involved in the making of this book. I am also intensely grateful to Jim van Os for his help when no one else was able to get through to me, for clarifying my contact with Christ, and the fact that he is always there to help fellow human beings in psychological need. I am extremely indebted to Father Dresmé for the conversations we conducted about faith, for his understanding of how I suffered and for his inspirational sermons in the Sint Vituskerk in which he places the ideas of God into a contemporary context.

Finally, Christ, I thank You for Your loving support and for encouraging me to write this book. *Here I Am*.

I wish you peace and hope you enjoy reading my story.

With love,

May-May

SEPARATED

The four of us are on a trip in Niels' shiny blue Volkswagen Beetle. We are driving in a parade of Beetles in the neighbourhood of the Keukenhof flower park. White, yellow, purple, red and pink tulip fields cover the ground like brightly coloured rugs as they pass our gaze. The children – my son and Niels' son – are having fun in the back seat, playing with their miniature dinosaurs. Niels moves the gear lever loosely, his silver chain bracelet dangling from his wrist. As we come to a stop in front of a traffic light, he tugs briefly at his cap. Before he pulls up, he winks at me and touches the top of my knee with his hand. A few moments later, the blue-grey sea comes into view behind the yellow-coloured sand dunes. In the past, I would always take a deep breath to sniff the salty sea air, now I simply smile faintly. The children are enjoying their ice cream on the beach during a break. We are part of a procession of Beetles and day trippers take photos of us. Noah, my five-year-old son, also wants to be photographed with his favourite Beetle – a red one with golden letters on the bonnet. It all seems fine. As if we are an ordinary family, the four of us on the road. The day is soon over.

Niels brings his son to his mother and I have to take Noah to his father, my ex-husband. Noah and I get into my light blue Volkswagen Polo.

‘Did you have a good time today, Noah?’ I ask.

‘Yes,’ he answers.

Having to bring Noah back isn’t easy for me. I turn on the Sesame Street CD. The music starts up. Together, Noah and I sing along loudly to our favourite song, *Two Best Friends*. When the song is over, Noah says enthusiastically: ‘One more time!’ And again we sing along at the top of our voices.

A little while later we drive past ‘Daddy’s house’, which is walled in by large dark green rhododendrons and closed off by a 2-metre-high brown fence. I enter the new code and soon the gates of the big fence slowly slide open automatically. The white house with the roof, which looks as if it’s thatched, contrasts nicely with the blue sky and is bordered by green deciduous trees. In the corner is my favourite red beech tree under which Vince and I used to sit on a wooden bench when I was pregnant with Noah. In front of us stretches the spacious lawn on which the three of us posed in the early spring sun when Noah was just born.

‘Mummy, why are you sad?’ Noah asks from the back seat. The medication helps stop me from crying, but Noah knows perfectly well when I’m sad. I answer him honestly: ‘Mummy finds it hard to be divorced, darling. But that’s the way it is, Mummy just has to get used to it. And now Daddy is with Sylvia and Mummy is with Niels.’

As I walk to the door, I can hear Sylvia’s children laughing on ‘our’ lawn. They take a run-up and slide across a long mat that has been sprayed with water. Noah quickly jumps out of the car, runs towards them and joins in. I’m so happy to see him so cheerful, he seems to have forgotten my sadness. At the same time it pains me all the more that ‘our house’ is no longer ‘our house’. Our wish for a

family with two children – what Vince and I had hoped for when we bought the house – will not be fulfilled.

From a distance I see Sylvia walking towards me across the green lawn. She has a firm stride. Her shiny thick golden blonde hair dances around her face and seems to have the same energy and resilience as herself. As she gets closer, I see that she is neatly made up with light blue mascara and pink lipstick.

‘Hey May, are you coming in for a cup of tea?’ she asks warmly.

‘Yes, OK,’ I answer hesitantly. We walk into the house. The door is open because of the warm weather. Feeling uncomfortable and stiff, I take a seat on the wooden stool at the bar in the kitchen. My movements are jerky due to the medication. Sylvia walks over to the kettle to boil some water. Through the kitchen window I see the white-pink magnolia, the view I had always enjoyed so much. Soon the kettle switches itself off. In the blink of an eye, Sylvia pours the water into two cups and places a cup of tea in front of me. She takes one herself. I watch the vapour rise from the cup.

‘The children are having a great time outside. How are you feeling, May?’ she asks enthusiastically with interest.

‘I’m OK,’ I murmur.

‘And have you managed to find a full-time job?’

‘No. I’m doing my best. I’ve written a lot of letters, but I often don’t get invited for an interview.’

‘Hang in there, May, I’m sure you’ll succeed!’

‘Yes,’ I answer, not entirely convinced. While I reflect on my struggle to find work, Sylvia continues exuberantly: ‘I’ve been asked to do the marketing for a big company.’

‘Oh, that’s nice for you,’ I say resignedly, as I lift up my cup of hot tea and put it down again, my hands shaking. The pain I’m suffering inside is too intense and too deep for me to be happy for her. At the same time I’m feeling too vulnerable to feel any envy.

Sylvia gets up to clear out the dishwasher. She takes the cups and places them in the cupboard opposite the dishwasher. Apparently they belong in a different place now. Sylvia's elegant sandals clatter loudly on the white marble floor as she walks back and forth. Just as if she's living there. *She does live there. And I'm the guest.* Just as I'm about to get up because I can't bear being in my old house any longer, Noah walks in.

'I want to sit on your lap, Mummy,' he says as he climbs onto my lap. He feels comfortable and I don't have to say anything for a while. He chats away merrily. I drink my tea and savour the moment of Noah sitting on my lap. His warm back presses against my chest and his little legs dangle in the air. Sylvia's words float past me. I answer at the right moment, as well as I can. She really means well, but my illness and my divorce from Vince have made such a tremendous impact that I've become very vulnerable. When I've finished my tea, and placed my cup on the bar with trembling hands, I put Noah on the floor and get up.

'Thank you for the tea,' I say to Sylvia.

'See you next week, dear Noah,' I say to Noah, giving him a big kiss and a hug.

I get into my car and drive down the long driveway. I catch a glimpse of Noah waving from behind the living room window. The brown doors of the gate slowly slide open. I wave back to Noah before driving through the gate, until he is out of sight.

I drive back to my new house. It's only a five-minute drive. I deliberately chose to live close to Noah's father's house. For much of the week, Noah is with his father. He's with me on Tuesdays, Thursdays and every other weekend. Noah and I live in a neat white terraced house. Noah often says it's 'a small house', but then I say that Daddy has a very big house. Although I thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful, detached house opposite the woods, I sometimes wonder whether I wasn't able to 'cope' with living in luxury, being a university lecturer, and living in a big house. Maybe

that's one of the reasons I had psychoses and got confused. As if I had flown too close to the sun for my doing because I'm such a simple person. Was I overconfident? Or was it my ambition to go into politics or to become a professor or was it the 'publish-or-perish' culture, or the time registration system at the university? Psychosis vulnerability in the family? My busy work schedule for the university, an equity fund in the field of microcredits, and being a member of the national election programme committee of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA)? Or a combination of all these things? I just don't know.

Before I realise it, I'm back at our white house on the corner of the street. As I open the green front door and walk through the corridor, Niels is standing in the living room. His friendly blue-grey eyes give me a reassuring feeling. As always, he looks very boyish and tough. Niels always likes to make sure his cap matches the colour of his shirt, and today he's wearing his blue cap, which goes well with his blue shirt. He tugs at the peak of his cap and walks towards me.

'What was it like to take Noah back?' he asks attentively.

'Difficult.'

'I know the feeling,' he says, sighing lightly.

'Yes,' I say, gently placing my hand on his chest.

'Tomorrow and the day after I'll be sleeping at home, I still have to wash some clothes and pick up some clean ones,' Niels says. I nod. He wraps his arms around my waist and gives me a kiss on my forehead. We find comfort in our love and each other's warmth.

While Niels holds me, I look around my own house. I see a white coffee table, an anthracite-coloured sofa, an Ikea TV cabinet. They're all my own, but I had no idea what I liked when I had to furnish my house at such short notice. I was ill and hospitalised in a psychiatric hospital. I let myself be guided by the taste of the person accompanying me at the time. The only thing dear to me is

the big green trunk that my grandmother and her children had with them when they moved from Indonesia to the Netherlands. Her initials, surname and *Amsterdam, MS Oranje* are painted on it in creamy white letters.

Niels walks up to my Ikea TV cabinet and turns on the television. Together we watch the television show *Try Before You Die*. The two female presenters are taking part in a mud-wrestling match and are shrieking with laughter. A feeling of worthlessness comes over me as I watch the programme, but I let it wash over me in resignation. When I was in good health I barely watched television and when I did take the time to watch, I watched the news or current affairs programmes. We watch television until it's time to go to bed.

Before we go to sleep, Niels and I lie in the spooning position, with Niels behind me. With his hand he strokes my shoulders, then my waist and hips, and down to my knees. His body and warmth give me a feeling of security, he gives me something to hold on to for a moment.

The next day I have to get up early to go to work at my part-time job as a PR officer for the Iranian news organisation *Shahrzad News*. *Shahrzad News* gives Iranian women a voice in the media. Contributions are made by independent journalists from Iran or the diaspora community. I drive to the *Wereldomroep* building at the Mediapark. In the past, my heart would miss a beat when the building came into view. I feel at home among all those journalists from different cultures or who work for other countries. Now I experience everything in a state of numbness. I take the lift to the fifth floor and walk into the room I share with my colleague. She hasn't arrived yet.

I want to escape the deep pain I have been feeling inside for years, the disease of schizophrenia, my divorce from Vince, my child barely seeing me, and my resignation from my job as a university lecturer. I'm also sick of the dull and hazy feeling in my head. Automatically, I walk to the window and look down from the high building. On the left is a large pond where ice skating parties are

organised in winter; now the ducks are floating quietly around it, and on the right is the road to the car park. It's a high building.

If I jump out of the window now, my pain will be over... Shall I...? What if I don't die instantly, maybe it hurts really badly... I break all my bones... There's blood everywhere....

I can't bear to think about it. I sigh. I don't dare. Besides, I'm a mother. It would also be humiliating for our editor-in-chief Mina, whom I admire so much. She's a courageous woman who comes from Iran herself and stands up for Iranian women. What would it be like for her to hear that an employee of hers...? I walk away from the window and sit at my desk. I check the Farsi-English-language website of *Shahrazad News* to see if any new stories have appeared from our Iranian correspondents. I click restlessly back and forth with my mouse between the different internet pages. Because I'm not able to read a whole article in one sitting, I slide open the roll-up door of the low office cupboard where the binders are stored. I unpack the blue binder in which I keep all the press releases, the overview of the funds, and notes. *Come on, concentrate on finding a company that wants to sponsor us*, I say to myself. That's how I suppress negative thoughts.

'Good morning May-May,' says my colleague Fatima when she comes in. She turns on the radio. 'Jump on behind me,' she sings along cheerfully. That defuses my melancholy mood. My drowsiness lasts until about eleven o'clock. I drink lots of coffee, which reduces it somewhat. At the beginning of the afternoon I receive an email from a British airline informing me that they want to take our glossy magazine *Iran* on board their flights to Tehran. Enthusiastically, I walk across to Mina's room next door. Mina is sitting behind her desk and looks up from her screen. She has short brown hair that she wears in a bob line. On the round table in her room stands a bouquet of fresh yellow tulips.

'Mina, can I talk to you for a moment?'

‘Yes, I’ll just finish this sentence, take a seat at the table while you’re waiting,’ Mina says. I sit down in a comfortable chair at the table. A little later, Mina joins me.

‘I’ve just received a message from the British airline BMI that they would like to take our glossy *Iran* onboard with them on their flights to Tehran.’

‘Congratulations, that’s great,’ she says with a smile.

‘There’s something else I want to tell you,’ I add quietly.

‘Yes, go ahead,’ says Mina, expressing interest.

‘I’ve got a psychological vulnerability. I’m vulnerable for psychoses, mania and depression.’

‘Oh, that’s good of you to tell me. How annoying for you. Does that bother you a lot?’ Mina asks sympathetically.

‘I feel better when I’m working,’ I answer.

‘Yes, I understand. Then you’ve got some distraction,’ says Mina.

‘Yes, exactly.’

Relieved, I leave the room and take a seat behind my desk again. I go back to work. At the end of the afternoon I feel tired.

‘Yes, that’s good,’ I suddenly hear Fatima say to the person on the phone. Her words give me a fright. I realise that I’d been somewhere else in my head for a while due to the drowsing effect of the sedatives I have to take. I also have a ‘ticking feeling’ in my head. I press the nails of my fingers hard into the palms of my hands to stay awake. I like this work and don’t want to be fired.

‘I’m going home, the children will be leaving school soon,’ says Fatima.

‘Sure, have a nice afternoon,’ I answer.

A few hours later, the editor-in-chief also goes home. I stay behind to look for companies that might sponsor us, I really get going in

the evening hours. I leave at nine o'clock. I have a short chat with the doorman. Then I leave the building through the sliding doors. I like working for long periods at a time and I can't stand being at home on my own. The house without Noah is too empty for me.

The next day the alarm clock goes off at half past nine. *I don't have to work today, I've got nothing to do*, are the thoughts that run through my head. I don't want to wake up, because when I'm asleep I'm free from my intense sadness. The alarm clock goes off for the next hour as thoughts shoot through my head: *No, I don't want to*. Long after the alarm clock has stopped ringing, I wake up. When I look at the clock, I see that it's half past twelve. *It's already half past twelve!* Niels is already at the factory, just as the majority of the Dutch have also long started work. As I get out of bed, my head echoes: *I'm late, I've got schizophrenia, I'm divorced and I hardly have any work*. I miss Noah so intensely that I'm in a kind of shock. Slowly, but quickly gaining momentum, a wave of warm gastric acid rises up through my oesophagus. I rush to the toilet in the bathroom. The small amount of food that I still have inside me from the previous evening comes out. The brown sludge mixes with the toilet water. I stay with my head above the toilet and throw up until I can't throw up anymore. Then I quickly rinse my mouth and brush my teeth. When I'm downstairs I try to have some breakfast. After putting my plate in the dishwasher, I feel empty. I look across the street to see if the neighbours have already opened their curtains. That's something that's not in my nature; I used to be too preoccupied with my own activities and plans to pay attention to what the neighbours were doing. I walk to the living room and without making a sound I start walking round the white square coffee table. I look at the baroque-style upright clock on the large green trunk from Indonesia. It's seventeen minutes past twelve. *I've got schizophrenia..., I'm divorced..., I have no work*. It keeps reverberating in my head like a mantra. *I've got schizophrenia..., I'm divorced..., I have no work. I've got schizophrenia..., I'm divorced..., I have no work*. After a while I look at the clock again. It's now twenty minutes past twelve. Twenty minutes...? *Only three minutes have*

passed! I continue to walk around the coffee table, step for step, hour after hour, until I suddenly hear ‘click’. It’s the flap of the letterbox. I open the living room door and see some envelopes on the doormat. I pick them up; a local newspaper, and a card with a picture of a cute little bear with a bunch of flowers. *Dear Sis, I wish you lots of strength and I’m thinking of you. Your little sister.* How sweet of her.

My brain is too bruised to come up with a goal or to get started. So I stay in the house and walk around the coffee table again. I’ve got an appointment with Tygo to go for a walk soon. We met during my previous admission in the Rembrandthof. He’s ten years older than me and worked as an editor at *Trouw*, the Dutch quality daily. Just like me, he’s in the recovery phase. Somewhere I read that walking is good for depression, and Tygo loves walking, just like me. In addition, I’m lucky to live in a wooded heathland environment.

The doorbell rings. I open the door and see Tygo standing in the doorway. He’s wearing a shirt, jeans and shoes that are neat but also suitable for walking.

‘Hey May-May,’ he says as we give each other three kisses on the cheek.

‘Hey Tygo.’

‘Shall we go for a walk right away?’ suggests Tygo.

‘Fine,’ I say as I put on my blue sneakers. A little later I close the green front door behind me. As I turn the key in the lock, my eye catches a glimpse of the two green boxwood shrubs on either side of the door. They look rather withered.

Tygo and I walk from my house in the direction of the Bussum heathland. We pass a row of shops, including the *Plaza* snack bar. Soon we can see the trees bordering the heath. After passing the trees, we arrive on the heath. The small fine purple heather flowers are in full bloom. We walk over a narrow sandy path between the heather flowers.

‘How are you, Tygo?’

‘OK. On Thursdays I help refugees learn Dutch and I’m still doing work for Tobi, the publisher of psychiatric books.’

‘Do you like that?’

‘I’d rather be working, but my coach at *reActivate* told me to put that out of my head. I’ll never be able to go back to work in my situation.’

‘Is that really the case?’ I ask sincerely and somewhat critically.

‘Yes, that’s what she said.’

‘Why does she think you can’t work anymore?’ I continue to probe.

‘Well, I’ve been through quite a lot.’

‘Maybe you should just get another coach,’ I suggest.

‘Hey, don’t push me like that. Mind your own business,’ says Tygo, making a defensive gesture with his hand.

‘Look, Scottish Highlanders,’ I say, seeing that Tygo clearly doesn’t want to talk any further.

The red-brown cow closest to us continues to graze, but I can see she’s watching me at the same time. There are five of them in a group. Impressed by their big horns, I walk past at a safe distance. Tygo walks a little closer to them.

Once we’re past the cattle, the restaurant comes into view behind the row of high trees. We drink fruit juice, and it’s not long before we’re walking back. The heathland looks stunning, as far as the eye can see. Above a small forest, white clouds float by in the blue sky.

‘Take a look around you, isn’t it beautiful!’ I say as I stand still and look around me. Tygo also stops and looks around. He smiles at me. I see affection in his eyes. We walk on again. We don’t encounter the cows this time. After our walk, Tygo goes back to his house in Hilversum.

In the evening, after dinner, I feel extremely restless. The house is so empty now that Noah isn't sleeping upstairs. I have to do something. I pace back and forth. *I want to leave, I have to get out of the house.* I call Tygo and Niels to ask them to go out with me. Fortunately, Tygo is happy to meet up again. A little later we're all sitting in Café Luno in the centre of Hilversum. I often went there when I was at the Rembrandthof. It's a *grand café*. The tables are set far apart, which I like, because I can't stand the sound of chatter.

'The allowance I get is really low, and then I have to pay alimony on top of that,' sighs Tygo.

'I wish I could work less. I get pains in my arms and legs when I lift things,' says Niels in support. You're in a privileged situation, May-May. You've got enough money and you don't have to work,' Niels says to me.

'I wish I *could* work more,' I sigh. 'I want my normal life back and I'm tired of sitting at home. I've been trying for years to find a job for four days a week.'

'Well, I wouldn't mind staying at home at all,' Niels answers.

'Oh yes? What would you do then?' I ask him.

'Tinker a bit with my Beetle, do some chores in the house. I wouldn't have any problems passing the time,' he answers.

We continue to share our problems this way until the end of the evening. I pay for the drinks. Everyone goes back to their own homes. Niels and Tygo both live in the centre of Hilversum and I cycle to my house in Bussum. As I cycle home through the woods, I pass under the tall trees that form an arch over the cycle path. The path is so long, they call it the Prayer Without End. My former mother-in-law once told me that. With sadness in my heart, *I miss her warmth*, I realise.

Before I go to bed I take my medication: an antipsychotic for my psychoses and a mood stabiliser for my vulnerability for mania. I brush my teeth, comb my long, dark brown hair that, as a result of

the medication, has been augmented with pale orange tufts instead of the deep red glow it used to have. I walk to the bedroom. In the middle of the bedroom stands a cream-coloured bed and against the wall there's a bright white country-style cupboard, which I chose because light colours remind me of God. I put on my pyjamas. Simple women's pyjamas that I bought in the supermarket, very different from the shiny burgundy satin negligée that I used to wear when I was still with Vince. I don't have the oomph to clean my face with cleansing lotion, like I used to. Tired, I get into bed and fall asleep.

In the middle of the night I wake up. Through the crack in the sand-coloured curtains I see that it's still pitch dark outside. A wave of anger swells up inside me.

How could Vince toss me aside just like that after fifteen years?

I clench my fists.

I was admitted to hospital against my will! He knows how much a family means to me! We were married! We were going to stay together for the rest of our lives!

I've never been so out of my mind in my life than I am now, and I tighten all my muscles. The anger rages for a while and courses through my whole body. It feels like one huge mass of energy.

And now he and Noah are living with other people in our house. She's lying in my bed, taking care of my child.

In anger, I turn over in bed and lie down on my other side. I bite my knuckles.

How dare he!

I'm furious and suddenly I understand how people are capable of committing a *crime passionnel*. But I stay in bed. The minutes pass. Slowly, little by little, the anger ebbs away and I fall asleep again.

The sun peeks through the curtains again and morning has arrived. The day is like any other. I get up and walk downstairs to have

breakfast. As usual I take a white bowl from the cupboard and pour organic yoghurt and muesli into it. After just three spoonfuls, the yoghurt drops with a cold splash in my stomach and I sink into despondency, so that I'm kneeling over the toilet bowl again a little later.

It so happens that today I have an appointment with my psychiatrist at the Rembrandthof, where I have been under treatment for a long time. A number of years ago I was forcibly admitted there for six months. After breakfast I drive my light blue car to the Rembrandthof.

A little later, I arrive at the pale yellow semi-circular building with the silver letters Rembrandthof on the facade. I walk up the stone stairs and the sliding doors open. After checking in with Marjan, the receptionist, I walk through the airy space with the two enormous palm trees. Then I take the wooden stairs in the glass stairwell.

In the waiting room on the first floor I take a cup of water. I'm scared that if I take coffee or tea I won't be able to lift the cup out of the vending machine, because my hands are shaking so much. I once dropped a cup of hot tea and since then I prefer to be safe. The gossip magazine *Privé* catches my eye. As I leaf through it, I see a photo of Paris Hilton. The woman with the long blonde hair is wearing a tight, light pink dress and is looking sultrily into the camera. I smile faintly without anyone noticing. A few years ago, when I was psychotic, I thought that whenever I saw a photo of Paris Hilton she had a special message for me. Paris means Paris, the city that means a lot to Bert Koenders, the Dutch former Minister for Development Cooperation. At least, I always assumed that. Just as I assumed that my goal was to work with Bert for world peace, after reading an interview in *de Volkskrant* that he was single. I left home, left my family behind to dedicate myself to my peace mission, but Bert did not come and instead I ended up first in the GGZ Delfland mental hospital and later in the Rembrandthof mental hospital. While I am reflecting on this, my psychiatrist

approaches. Grace is wearing a neat blouse with jeans and her chestnut-brown sleek hair falls to her shoulders.

‘Come this way, May-May,’ she says, shaking my hand and leading me to her room. When we get there, she skilfully slides the sign next to her door to *Do not disturb*.

‘How are you?’ Grace asks with interest.

‘I’m fed up with my illness, the medicine. It makes it difficult for me to get up. At the weekend I get out of bed for Noah to make sandwiches and turn on the TV. As soon as he’s sitting in front of the TV I go back to bed to sleep for a few hours.’

‘Can you stay awake for your work?’

‘Yes, I can.’

‘Your child is more important than your work. You should certainly be able to stay up for him.’

I catch my breath.

‘And how are things otherwise?’

I sigh and mumble: ‘I had a tantrum the other day when I was thinking about the divorce.’

‘Oh?’

‘Yes, I was lying in bed and I’ve never been so furious in my life.’

‘And what did you do then?’

‘Nothing, I just remained furious. I didn’t do anything else. I waited until it was over.’

‘I don’t think you’ve got past your mourning phase yet,’ says Grace, looking at me in earnest.

‘You could be right. Oh yes, there’s something else I want to ask you. My diagnosis. Am I still diagnosed with schizophrenia?’

'You're currently also taking a mood stabiliser, lithium, so I think the diagnosis of "schizoaffective bipolar disorder" is more accurate.'

'Yes, I'm also prone to mania. But I feel that the depression is mainly due to the side effects of the drugs and the circumstances.'

'That's possible, but it's hard to say. It could also be due to your illness.'

I remain silent. *I'm sure it's due to the medication.*

The phone rings.

'Oh, I have to answer this. I'm on call,' says my psychiatrist.

I nod. I understand.

'Yes, I'm in a conversation right now. I'll be right there,' says my psychiatrist. Then she hangs up.

'You know, May-May, you're going through quite a lot. I think you're a tough cookie. You're a remarkable patient.'

I smile faintly.

Someone understands what I'm going through. Someone who considers me to be important!

'Do you still have enough medicine?'

'Oh, I forgot to look. I think I still have enough for a week.'

'Shall I give you a prescription for a month?'

'Yes, that's fine.'

Grace prints out the prescription and gives it to me. I put the prescription in my purse in the section I keep my banknotes. Grace and I make an appointment for next time. Then I walk out again down the wooden stairs through the glass stairwell. Half an hour is over in no time. In the hall below I take a coin from the vending machine so that I can exit the car park.

Outside, in front of the pale yellow, semi-circular building of the Rembrandthof, I call my sister Famke. She is two and a half years younger than I am. We're in contact every day. Usually she calls me to ask how things are going and to keep a finger on the pulse. We've known each other all our lives. She is slim and has the same big brown innocent eyes as our mother and long, shiny dark brown hair. Famke graduated in psychology with a minor in clinical psychology. She works for a company in the field of reintegration.

'Hi Fam, it's me.'

'How are you?' Famke asks.

'I've just seen my psychiatrist. She thinks I shouldn't put Noah in front of the TV with a sandwich at the weekend and then go back to bed. She thinks I should stay up with him.'

'Yes, but you can't, can you?'

'No, I can't,' I answer, feeling sad, but also a little reassured because Famke understands.

'And what else?'

'She also said that I'm a remarkable patient and a tough cookie.'

Oh, that's very sweet of her! You are too,' my sister answers.

'What are you going to do now, May?' she continues.

'Oh, I think I'll go back home. What about you?'

'I'm on my way to a client.'

'OK, take care, dear Fam.'

'Bye, kisses for you.'

I walk to the car park and get into my car. I put the coin in the device at the barrier and when it goes up I exit the car park.

The days, the months and the years pass by. Especially on family days like Christmas, I miss being with our old family very much. It's

during these periods that I feel the dull pain the most. Nevertheless, little by little it's getting better. As I get livelier and brighter again, Niels has more trouble dealing with me. 'I liked you better when you were sick – nice and quiet,' he jokes. Despite the many fun things we do together as a new and blended family, our blended family also has its problems. For example, it's difficult to talk about raising the children. Niels and I are both different and, apart from the lack of our life partners, we appear to have little in common. He, in turn, finds it difficult to live with me. Niels and I have broken up and then got back together again many times.

One day I realise that I really have to take the step. I'm sitting in the living room on the anthracite-coloured couch. Niels has just come in.

'Niels, I want to tell you something.'

'What?' Niels asks. His voice doesn't sound as steady as usual and he looks at me questioningly.

'We're too different. I want to stop.'

'What!?'

His eyes look for confirmation. When he sees from the look in my eyes that I'm serious, he freezes and looks down at the floor.

'OK, that's it then. I'm going to get some cigarettes.'

He walks out of the house and slams the door shut. A little later he comes back to collect his things. He walks back and forth several times to fetch his clothes from the cupboards. I feel guilty and sad, but I know it's the right decision and that this time I have to stand firm. I'm still sitting on the couch when I hear him walking down the stairs in his army boots. The living room door swings open.

'The key,' he says, as he puts his key down on the table with some force. Niels marches off down the corridor and walks out through the door. I hear the exhaust popping as he tears away in his Beetle.

DEPRESSION

My good friend Irma and I are sitting on high white wooden stools at a small beach café by the sea. Her brown eyes are hidden behind her large, round, black fifties-style sunglasses. She's cheerful and subdued at the same time. We met at the hotel school in Maastricht. She lives with her father on a farm. The soft sea breeze strokes my skin. Irma takes a sip of her coke and asks: 'How's your friend who emigrated to Madagascar doing? Saskia? How is she?'

'Fine, she met a nice guy there.'

'Really, how nice for her. What kind of guy?'

'His name's David. He's from Madagascar and makes music. He's a well-known musician there.'

'How nice for her to have met someone!'

'Yes, definitely.'

'And that restaurant she opened, how's that going?'

'It's going well, I think.'

I don't say very much to Irma. It only makes me miss Saskia even more intensely. I gaze out to the sea. After a moment of silence I say to Irma with a sigh: 'Niels and I have broken up.'

'Oh, how sad for you!'

'Yes, we were too different.'

'So that was it. And you'd been together for quite a while.'

'Yes, two and a half years.'

As always, when things threaten to become too intense, Irma breaks through the tension in a light-hearted way.

'Shall we go for a swim in the sea?' she suggests.

She walks towards the sea, in the distance on the horizon a big ship sails by. Without any hesitation, Irma walks through the water and swims out a short distance. No cold feet there. I walk towards her, but I don't swim. The sea water feels like a cold girdle around my waist. Irma stands up out of the water and walks towards me. I sigh: 'It's so difficult not having very much energy. Noah also notices that he's always the last person to be dressed for swimming.'

'Well, your motherhood doesn't depend on that,' says Irma encouragingly. I walk a few steps further through the sea back to the shore. Irma follows me.

'I'm a useless mother,' I say in despair.

'What makes you think that?'

'I'm depressed and Vince and I are divorced. That's two things that are bad for children for a start.'

'But whatever you do, Noah loves you! You're his mother,' exclaims Irma. She walks up to me. Her heart-warming words make me feel good for a while. They're like gentle kisses on a gaping wound. I get out of the water and Irma comes with me.

Afterwards we eat an ice cream on the beach. I take a lick of the vanilla ice cream with the hard chocolate pieces, but it doesn't have any taste for me. Irma cheers me up until it's time to go home again. I ask her to say hello to her father.

The next day sees me walking around the table in the living room again. I want to stop feeling the intense pain. The idea of committing suicide resurfaces. It grows as slowly as an ivy climbing up a tree. You can't see the ivy growing, but little by little I can't breathe. I feel worthless. But this time it's different from before. At the end of my psychosis, a few years ago, I felt like a trapped wild horse and on an impulse – an enormous feeling of being agitated – I felt that the best thing I could do was to throw myself off the rocks, looking for freedom. Just like the horse 'Golden Boy' in the *Pony Club*, a magazine I used to read as a horse girl. It's also different from that time when I walked up to the attic, because I had the idea that 'it always happens there.' I was standing in the attic at the time, but I went back downstairs again without doing anything, because I really had no idea how to do it. Harming myself was difficult for me to conceive. *How should I do it?* It's also different from those times I stood at the station and thought: *What if I... No, I don't dare. It's terrible for the driver.* The idea of hurting someone else or myself was something very far off.

But this time... This time there is a certain resignation. I've read somewhere *how* you could do it, and that's how I'm going to do it. I now have an idea for escaping the unbearable pain.

I'm just about to get up to carry out my plan when my mobile phone rings. It's Famke.

'How are things today?'

'Bad.'

'What's wrong?'

'The same old things,' I sigh.

'My illness, the divorce, losing my job, problems with the medication. And I was the one who wanted to stop seeing Niels, but I'm alone a lot now that he's gone.'

'Do you still think about death?'

'Yes, and I've read somewhere about how I can do it.'

There is silence on the other end of the line. Famke has been listening to me every day for years, she's familiar with my moods of depression, but this is new for her. She worries about me, I can feel it.

'Oh?'

'Yes.'

'Would you do that?'

'Yes, I can't take it anymore.'

'Oh my,' sighs Famke.

Silence falls. Famke thinks for a moment.

'Maybe it would be better if you allow yourself to be admitted?'

'I think so too.'

'Wait, I'll call the Rembrandthof for you and come and get you,' says my sister.

'All right,' I mumble.

'See you soon,' she says.

'See you soon,' I answer, relieved that she's coming.

Then we hang up. I continue walking around the coffee table.

A few hours later my sister rings my doorbell. When I see her sweet face I feel a bit reassured, but I'm too depressed to greet her enthusiastically. She walks down the corridor and opens the door of the living room.

'I've called Grace, you can come to the Rembrandthof tonight,' she says, as soon as she's in the living room.

'OK,' I answer. I feel that there's nothing else to do but to have me admitted again.

I walk up to the attic, looking for my dark blue suitcase. It's at the front, behind the wooden partitions with all kinds of boxes filled with books. Somewhat chaotically I walk to the bedroom with the suitcase. Hastily, I pack a pair of jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, my supermarket pyjamas and some toiletries.

As Famke drives me to the Rembrandthof and we enter the building a little later, it almost feels familiar. For the first time in my life I allow myself to be admitted voluntarily. How different it was from the first time I was there due to my psychoses. I was terribly embarrassed then and didn't think I was sick at all. Now I'm ashamed too, but the realisation that I need help is much stronger. I can't do it anymore. We walk along the long white corridors and are welcomed by Bob, the nurse I remember from my previous forced admission.

'Hey May-May, back again?'

'Yes, that's the way it is, Bob.'

'You're in room number seven, here's the key,' he says.

'We'll pay you the deposit shortly,' my sister answers.

Famke and I walk down the white corridor to my room. When we get there, I open the door with the key. The bed has already been made. The yellow-orange bedspread is still the same, as is the wooden desk in the corner and the yellow linoleum on the floor. I put my suitcase down in a corner and Famke puts my clothes in the simple white wardrobe. When she has put all the clothes in the closet, Famke gives me a hug and says: 'It's good that you let yourself be admitted, May.'

'Will you be back soon?'

'Yes, of course,' she says. I wave goodbye to her as she walks down the long white corridor.

When Famke is gone, I walk to the large courtyard garden that also looks the same as last time. The garden is walled in on one side by the glass stairwell and on almost all other sides by the pale yellow walls of the clinic. The inner garden has different levels. You can walk down to sit on a bench between low bushes and a small white gravel path. There's also a bronze-coloured statue about two and a half metres high of three male figures on top of each other. The one on top looks like a rabbit. As I sit down on a wooden bench and reflect on the fact that I have been admitted again, a woman comes walking into the garden, shouting. She's somewhere in her fifties and her back is slightly bowed.

'Whore!! 'Whore!!' she shouts.

Who is she talking to? It seems as if she's talking to me, because I'm the only one in the courtyard. I look at the woman. There is panic in her eyes, and her dark brown hair falls in strands over her face. She doesn't look at me. I assume she's having a psychosis, so I let her be. This time I can leave it to the nurse to help her. Luckily, she keeps some distance from me.

'Fuck!!!'she screams at no one in particular.

'Whore!'

I walk away from her, to a quieter part of the patio. My phone rings. Tygo's name appears on the display. I accept the call.

'Hi May-May, it's me, Tygo. I heard you've been admitted again. How are you?'

'I'm in a depression.'

'How annoying. Can I come and see you?'

'Yes please.'

'OK, I'll drop by next week. I'll discuss it with your sister.'

He hangs up. I'm so glad he cares about me.

'May-May, are you coming for dinner?' asks nurse Madelon. She has thick blonde hair and wears black mascara. She looks a bit like Marilyn Monroe. I remember her from my previous admission.

'Yes, I'm coming,' I reply.

When I walk into the living room, Bob is already putting plastic tubs filled with potatoes on the tables. I introduce myself to the other patients. When Bob sits down, I join him. Seated next to him is a boy wearing a cap. He reminds me a bit of Niels, but he has a strange hard look in his eyes and mumbles to himself. When I introduce myself, he just murmurs: 'Hi.' We eat our food quickly. Bob says something chirpy every now and then.

The day after my admission, Vince and Noah drop by during visiting hours. Noah runs enthusiastically towards me. I give him a big hug. I become unsteady and look to the wall for support to keep my balance.

'Take it easy with Mummy, Noah,' says Vince.

Vince has a pair of jeans on and a dark blue jumper above which the border of his white shirt sticks out. I'm glad he's dressed casually, it makes me feel comfortable. We're allowed to sit in the comfort room. It's a room that doesn't have such a clinical look. The walls are ochre yellow, there's a couch, a table, a television and a home trainer.

'Look, Mummy, I've got three drawings for you,' says Noah as he hands them to me. They're real children's drawings, with lots of scratches.

'Three?' I ask in amazement. I pat him on his head.

'Yes, look.' This is Daddy's house and the dog. This is us, Mummy. And this is a fire engine.'

I look closely at the drawing of the big doll with long black hair and the small doll with short brown hair. Noah and me.

‘Very well done, Noah. That’s sweet of you.’

‘You have to get better,’ I say to myself. Vince doesn’t seem to notice.

‘What’s it like here?’ he asks.

‘It’s fine. I’m a bit more used to it now.’

‘And what did you eat this evening?’

‘Oh, it was tasty. We had rice with egg, saté sauce and *atjar*. The food tastes a bit better than when I was admitted last time.’

‘Are you keeping yourself occupied?’

‘Oh, there’s still a day programme. With creative therapy and walking, and so on. In the evening, after visiting hours, I think I’ll play volleyball again. Noah, when I’m out of here, we’ll go to the zoo together, OK?’

Yes. Nice, Mummy!’

Before I realise it, visiting hours are over. I walk Vince and Noah to the car so that I can be with them as long as possible. The big, high dark blue BMW stands out among the other cars. In the distance I can see the high tower of the Sint Vituskerk.

You have to get better, I keep saying to myself as I wave them off in the car park. I watch Noah and Vince until all I can see is the roof of their car. They turn left at the end of the road and then they’re out of sight.

A few days later, I have a talk with my psychiatrist from the open ward. As I’m used to, it’s a different psychiatrist to the one from the outpatients’ clinic. I walk to the nurses’ office and see the psychiatrist from the ward waiting for me. He has a friendly face and a long ponytail. We walk to a white room containing a wooden desk and three simple chairs.

‘So, May-May, how are you?’ he asks in a light German accent.

‘Better.’

'Better than when you came in? Why do you think that is?'

'Because of my son's three drawings. Somehow I'm taking some kind of willpower from them.'

'Oh?'

'Yes. Normally Noah has trouble making one drawing. I want to see him grow up. I want to see him get his swimming certificate. To see him get his first boyfriend or girlfriend.'

'That's good,' the psychiatrist answers sincerely.

'I want to go back home.'

'Yes, I understand.' That's what we're working towards. But since you were quite depressed when you came here, I think it would be good if you stayed another few days. What do you think about that?'

'That's fine,' I say.

'And what about your medication, how are you getting on with that?'

'I think I'm getting depressed because of those antipsychotics, but I'm afraid that I won't be able to reduce them because then I'll become psychotic again.'

'Yes, I think you're right. And I don't think this is the right time to reduce the dosage.'

He looks at me to see if I have anything else to ask.

'OK, then let's leave it at that,' he says when he sees that that's not the case.

Then we stand up and shake hands. The psychiatrist gives me a friendly nod. Relieved, I walk out of the consulting room.

The next morning we're woken at a quarter to eight. Somewhat drowsy from the medication, I get up. Breakfast hasn't changed in all those years. There's white bread and brown bread, the toppings

– jam, cheese and cold cuts – are in baskets. There's an elderly woman sitting at the breakfast table. Her walker is next to her, I've never seen her before. She's looking at her plate. This time around I don't feel the same bond with my fellow patients as I did during my first admission. As if I'm the odd one out.

After breakfast I take part in creative therapy. I'm a bit late. When I walk into the therapy room I see that my favourite creative therapist is still working there. She walks up to the cupboard to get some felt-tip pens. Her long light-red hair glimmers in the sunlight that shines into the therapy room and, as always, she smiles warmly at us, the patients. Around her neck she's wearing a necklace with beads. She is really passionate about her profession and loves to do craftwork with her patients. I think she would even manage to get Prime Minister Mark Rutte to cut out figures. I look at the boy with the cap. He is diligently colouring in a mandala. I decide to do the same and grab a pack of coloured pencils and a mandala too. Just like in the old days, I circle the lines with felt pen and colour in with pencil. The hour passes quickly.

After lunch I go to dance class, where we still have the same dance teacher as during my previous admission. The dance teacher's name is Ruby and she comes from Australia. Although she stands proudly erect, like a real dancer, she also has a certain gentleness in her appearance. The lessons are in a circle-shaped room and we're instructed to dance to the music with a scarf made from a very fine organza fabric. I choose a white scarf. Soon we hear the first notes of the song *Closer* by Ne-Yo. I do my best and walk back and forth, letting the scarf flutter behind me. We did this exercise during my previous admission too. I felt like a heavenly temptress then. Now I feel like a stiff, fat woman hobbling about. But I do my best, my son wants me to come home.

One day, the psychiatrist I had right at the very beginning asks to see me. I trust her and talk to her about my depression. At the end of the conversation, as she's accompanying me to the waiting room, my sister calls. She's on her way here with my mother and Noah.

Good, then I can introduce Noah to Grace, I think. But there's another very tiny voice that's saying: It's important that she sees Noah, it's important for him that you stay alive.

'Grace, my sister and my mother are on their way here with Noah. I'd really like to introduce you to him. He'll be here in a few minutes,' I tell her.

'Well then I'll wait for a moment,' Grace replies. I breathe a sigh of relief.

A little later, I hear Noah come in.

'Look, this is Noah,' I say gently and somewhat helplessly to Grace.

'Hello Noah, I'm Grace,' says Grace.

'Hello,' says Noah.

'Fine, you can go back to Grandma now. I'll be right there, Noah,' I say. As Noah walks back to Grandma, Grace says, 'May-May, I'm really shocked. You introduced me to Noah. It really felt as though you wanted to let me know: "He's my child, please help me." Surely things aren't that bad?'

'No, May. You just wanted to introduce Noah,' my sister says hopefully.

I feel bewildered when I see their seriously anxious looks. 'Oh, no, I only wanted to introduce Noah,' I reply quickly.

'OK,' replies Grace. 'Take care of yourself and I'll see you next time.' Then she walks back to her room.

The days pass quickly. In the evenings I receive visitors: especially family, girlfriends, including my friend Irma, a good friend I remember from the old days, and Tygo. Within a week or two I can go back home. I'm very lucky. Three drawings. Three drawings made by my son.

YOUR CV CAN BE FILED IN THE ROUND ARCHIVE

Noah, my mother, my sister and I celebrate my homecoming with a visit to the zoo. Before we leave, I ask myself if it's not a tragedy for the animals to be stuck in cages, but then I remember the promise I made to Noah when I was admitted. The polar bears are one of the highlights of our visit. We're standing in a covered area and in front of us we can see through the window where the polar bears are swimming. A polar bear dives down and swims right up close to Noah, and continues swimming close to Noah for a while. Noah laughs out loud with pleasure.

Then we go outside and the four of us pose for a picture on a bench. Noah sits on my lap, in his hands he holds a long grass stem that he has picked. The day flies by.

A few weeks after being discharged from the psychiatric hospital, I recall that I wanted to make myself useful, to have a job again. After working for ten years at the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam – the period in which I became ill – I'm having difficulties finding a permanent job again. I worked at the VARA broadcasting company for six months and I've been doing projects for the Iranian news organisation *Shahrzad News* for a number of years now. I keep applying, looking for a job for four days a week. Even for a job as a

policy officer, the employers think I'm too highly qualified. That's why I apply for a position at the municipality at vocational college level, but I don't even get invited for an interview. I also offer to do the marketing for an international start-up in solar panels, but the young entrepreneur prefers working with a more experienced entrepreneur. I do voluntary work on a care farm, but they don't need me there anymore because – unlike other volunteers – they don't get an allowance for me. As a farewell gift they give me a paper bag filled with sweets, homemade bread, homemade strawberry jam and fresh eggs. *Well, I wasn't really suited for practical work anyway*, I try to convince myself.

During one of my outpatient visits, my social-psychiatric nurse advises me to at least do *something*. 'What about pouring tea in an old people's home?' she suggests cheerfully. I feel like I'm sinking through the floor. *Pouring tea in an old people's home? My hands shake due to the medication, so how can I pour tea?* I don't pick up on the fact that she is mentioning it as a temporary option, it feels as though the rest of my life is mapped out for me. *Pouring tea in an old people's home*. Disappointed, I walk out.

When I get home, I browse through a magazine my mother gave me. It contains an interview with professor Halleh Ghorashi. She has also suffered from depression. In the magazine she says: 'Remember that there is light at the end of the tunnel.' Reading this statement does me good. It's one of the bright spots that I cling to. I also think of Noah's three drawings.

Nevertheless, I decide to continue my search for work. I turn again to the job coach at the Rembrandthof. He's a somewhat older man with a slim build. Prior to our interview, I send him my CV. Although I'm not very optimistic about it, because he's shown me the door several times already, I enter the Rembrandthof building again with a light feeling of hope.

'Hello,' he says, giving me a hand. 'So tell me, what have you been doing?'

I thought I'd already told him that in an earlier conversation, but since he asks me, I start telling him my story.

'I have a PhD in communication science and then I was a university lecturer. After that I worked at the VARA and then for an Iranian news organisation.'

'What kind of work can you do?'

'I can't read scientific articles properly anymore, that's why I resigned from the university. But I can still do something reasonably practical. I've been looking at vacancies in the field of communication.'

'Communication? And which sites do you look at?'

'*Villamedia*. But a lot of people respond to those vacancies.'

'And what about the national job board?'

'I look there sometimes. But in general those jobs don't fit with my background. During my internship at the Hotel Management School, I sometimes helped make beds in a hotel, in housekeeping, but I'm not very good at that. I'm too slow.'

'I'll take a look at vacancies,' he says, turning to his computer screen.

He remains silent for a moment. Then he says: 'Well, I can't find anything either.'

'Too bad,' I answer, somewhat disappointed.

As I get up, he puts away my CV.

'I think your CV is good for the round archive,' he says.

The wastebasket? I wonder, shocked. My mouth falls open, but I'm too outraged to ask if I understood him correctly and to say anything about it. He terminates the conversation with these words. I say goodbye to the job coach and walk out of the room.

STOPPING MY MEDICATION

'I'm so bothered by the side effects of the medication, that's why I want to stop.'

'What side effects do you have?' asks my new psychiatrist, Gerbrand, from the outpatients' clinic, staring at me in astonishment. I'm at a loss for words. I've been a patient at the Rembrandthof for six and a half years. I've always talked about the side effects of the medication and they still don't know I suffer from them? What have I been doing there all those six and a half years, if they don't even listen to me? Reluctantly, I reel off the list again: 'I suffer from depression – which is exacerbated by the medication, I think – I have little energy, I've put on twelve kilos, I feel very drowsy, especially when I was taking Zyprexa, I can't wake up in the morning, I often throw up, I find it difficult to cry, I can't get angry anymore, my speech is lifeless, I have trouble reading, I have more cavities in my teeth.' I don't dare say anything about my diminished libido, but that isn't as serious as my other complaints.

The psychiatrist looks at me. He breaks the silence: 'And still I think you should continue to take the medication for the rest of your life.'

I feel as though the ground is sinking beneath me. *The rest of my life?! I'll never be able to keep that up.* As always, at the end of the conversation we make an appointment for the following session. I leave the psychiatric hospital even gloomier than when I entered it.

When I get home, I pace back and forth in the house. I walk around the table in the living room. After five minutes I walk to the kitchen window and back to the table in the living room. I try to picture my son's drawings, but it makes me despondent when I realise that I will be so drowsy for the rest of my life. At the end of the day, I call the Crisis Service.

'Good evening. Clinic A.'

'May-May here.'

'I'm Bob. What can I do for you?'

'I really can't take it anymore.'

'What's wrong, May-May?'

'I've been told I have to take medication for the rest of my life.'

'That *is* a long time.'

'I'll never be able to keep that up.'

'Try to keep it up for a while first, then you can see how it goes.'

'I don't know... I don't know. I'm having so many problems with the medication.'

'Yes, we hear that a lot. It usually gets better after a while.'

'I've been on medication for a long time.'

'Maybe you can talk to your doctor about switching to other medication.'

'I've tried so many different kinds.'

'Who knows, your doctor might have a solution for you. At least try to think in short periods at a time.'

'Yes, you're right. Thank you.'

'Are you feeling better?'

'Yes, I'm feeling a little better already.'

'Great.'

'You don't mind me calling?'

'Of course not, that's what we're here for. And when's your next appointment here?'

'Next week.'

'Ah, that's good. If it doesn't work out in the meantime, feel free to call again.'

Feeling a little more relaxed, I hang up. The huge panic and the heavy feeling in my head is back in its cage for a while.

I decide to ask for advice and call Anoiksis, the patients' association for people with psychosensitivity. They say that Jim van Os is a scientist who stands up for people with psychoses and that he wants to ban the term 'schizophrenia'. That really appeals to me, because I have suffered from that term, even though I'm now diagnosed as having 'schizoaffective disorder'.

During a previous admission, I wanted to help improve the survey concerning being confined to solitary confinement (analysing the design of surveys was part of my old job). At the time, a nurse indicated that the world was more than just the hospital and that I could also use my talents outside the psychiatric hospital. This gives me the idea of looking into the possibility of writing another article where I combine my scientific knowledge with psychiatry. I send Jim an email and suggest, among other things, that I write an article with him about how patients experience the contact with their therapists. Jim responds positively.

I really start to get a taste for it and via an appeal on the internet I come into contact with Martin van 't Klooster. He has been asked to

write a chapter in a book about the stigmatisation and destigmatisation of people with a mental disorder. The chapter he's writing covers the role of the media when it comes to stigmatisation and destigmatisation. When he hears that my PhD research was about the effects of media coverage, Martin asks me if I want to become a co-author, something I'm only too happy to discuss.

The next time I go to see my psychiatrist, I find myself walking up the stairs of the Rembrandthof with a light feeling of hope. What's more, I feel so bored at home that it feels good to have an appointment outside the house.

'May-May, sit down,' he says, when I walk in. As I sit down, he walks to his door to switch the sign of his room to *Do not disturb*.

'How are you?' he asks, taking his seat behind his desk.

'I'm fine. Someone invited me to write a chapter about media and stigmatisation. I'm also going to write an article with Jim van Os.'

'Jim van Os, the Professor of Psychiatry in Maastricht?'

'Yes, that's him.'

'That's good news,' he says. He browses briefly through my file on his computer.

'And there's something else I want to talk to you about. To be honest, I'm also very shocked. I saw in your file that you called the Crisis Service?'

'Yes, I can't stand having to take medication for the rest of my life.'

'Oh, why not?'

'Because of the side effects,' I answer, rather abruptly. I think he really means well, but apparently we don't understand each other. I decide to give up trying. The rest of the conversation passes me by. A little later I walk down the wooden stairs again, through the glass stairwell, on my way out.

One day in spring I manage to get up early. Once again I get tears in my eyes when I read in the newspaper about what's happening to the people in Syria. In the gym I'm able to walk a bit faster than normal. I have the idea that I can feel the blood flowing through my veins again and that I'm alive again! But when I go to bed in the evening, I see from my medicine box that it still contains the medicines I should have taken the previous evening... I forgot to take them. That's why, in the morning, I no longer had the feeling that I wouldn't be able to cope with the day! I realise that Gerbrand told me only recently that I would have to take medication for the rest of my life. But because I don't think I'll ever manage to do that, and because I'm feeling so much better – it wasn't due to my age or my illness, as I've been told so many times – I decide to secretly reduce the dosage of my medication.

I feel much better with the lower dosage of medication. It's the weekend and Noah is with me. When I get up early in the morning I notice that I've got some energy again. I make Noah some brown bread sandwiches with sprinkles and put them in front of him. Then I turn on the TV and sit next to him on the couch.

'What are you doing here?' Noah asks me. He's watching a TV show featuring two teenagers, Sam and Cat.

'I'm doing fine. I'm going to stay on the couch with you,' I answer cheerfully.

'I don't want you to do that at all, I want to watch TV on my own,' says Noah.

I look at him, stunned.

'Don't you like it when I'm with you?'

'No, I want to be alone, that's what I said! Go away,' he says determinedly.

Still astounded, I walk up the stairs to do my laundry. As I put my laundry in the washing machine, I think: *And to think that all these years I've been feeling guilty because I couldn't get out of bed!*

I write this down in my diary, as well as expressing the fear that I will become sick again because I have reduced the dosage of my medication. I also terminate the treatment sessions with my psychiatrist. I like him, but I feel he doesn't fully understand how I'm suffering from the side effects of the medication. I don't want any more blood tests, I don't want any more conversations, I never want to have anything to do with the Rembrandthof again!

WARS AND THE MISSION FOR PEACE

Through my work for the Iranian news organisation *Shahrzad News*, I find myself at a WOMEN Inc. congress. According to their website, they're a network for women who want to give themselves and each other a boost. On the conference floor there's a paper tree where participants can write their most heartfelt wishes on a piece of paper. On one of the notes on the tree there is an appeal for a PR plan for *Women for Peace* to be written. I feel that this is *the* opportunity for me to work for peace, something I've considered important since I was admitted with a psychosis, but up till now had not had the chance to do. As soon as I get home, I email the chairperson and am invited to come to the office in Amersfoort one evening.

In addition to the chairperson Thea, another very friendly and active lady called Anne is present. They ask if I can help them draw up a PR plan because the members of *Women for Peace* are getting old. Most of the women are somewhere in their 70s. I indicate that it's important to organise attractive campaigns. That way, you will be promoting peace as well as attracting people. The discussion at *Women for Peace* results in several meetings. Key lessons I learn

from *Women for Peace* are that it's particularly important to touch people's hearts, that weapons lead to more misery and that it's important to tell the truth. Anne lives close by me. Later I also learn from her that it's important to talk to your enemy and to focus on peace from the bottom up. Anne always signs her emails with a quote from Gandhi: 'There is no way to peace, peace is the way'. Anne and I organise a statement of support for peace activists in Syria and post this on Facebook.

In the summer, the media report extensively on the war in Syria. I am enormously shocked by the powerful images I see on television and in the newspapers. The bombings and the large-scale poison gas attacks in which many people (including children) are killed and injured. One photo in *de Volkskrant* in particular touches me deeply. A Syrian father covered in dust and blood clutching his wounded son. An intense feeling of sorrow overwhelms me and for the first time in years silent tears slide down my cheeks again. What are we humans doing to each other? The photo aptly illustrates the pointlessness of war.

I decide to do something, however small. I write a long letter to President Barack Obama about three conflicts in the Middle East and a call for peace. I say that the letter is from a mother in the Netherlands and that the American president might be familiar with our country from the Peace Palace in The Hague, which was built exactly a hundred years ago. The title of the letter is: *An urgent call for peace in Syria*. The letter deals with three conflicts in the Middle East: Syria, the relationship between Iran and the United States, and the Israel-Palestine issue. In the letter I make a suggestion for solving the conflicts in several phases. A senior lecturer on International Relations at the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam and *Women for Peace* support my letter. Sad to say, I never get a reply.

In my time as a scientist, I was used to mainly using my cognitive side to study scientific articles, but now I allow my heart to speak more; as if it tells a universal truth. In the same way, my attention is

drawn to a stunning photograph of two boys, one Israeli and the other Palestinian, embracing each other. The caption is: *Anything war can do, peace can do better*. Gradually, it starts to dawn on me that my psychoses are giving me new insights. Insights that you cannot learn from books, but by following your heart.

THE DUTCH SECRET SERVICE (AIVD) IS BUGGING ME AGAIN

As I eat my muesli with yoghurt at the round glass dining table downstairs and leaf through *de Volkskrant* newspaper, I have been taking a minimum dose of medication for several months now. My eye is caught by an article about a whistle-blower, Edward Snowden. He's a former CIA technical system administrator and reveals that the National Security Agency (NSA) monitors online communication worldwide.

Is what I have been thinking true? Am I indeed being bugged by the secret service? You see, I was right after all!

I think that these NSA actions are unacceptable and I reach out to take my phone out of my handbag. *Where did I put that thing?* I rummage through my handbag and my fingers feel a rectangular plastic object. My phone. I click on the blue bird icon and tweet that Edward Snowden should be in some sort of NSA sounding board group.

The secret service knows what I'm typing on my phone. They're watching me from a secret location.

I place my muesli bowl and teacup in the dishwasher.

Then I go to the toy shop in the village to buy a present for the birthday boy next door. I'm delighted that Noah has been invited to his swimming party this evening. It's nice that he has some friends in my neighbourhood as well. When I walk into the toy shop, the sight of so many different bright colours makes my ears hurt and my eyes dizzy. Bright pink boxes containing a white toy pony, purple wheelbarrows, bright yellow inscriptions. It's too much for me. I quickly walk to the section where you can carve dinosaurs out of a stone. There's a man standing there. He smiles at me.

Is he from the secret service? Did he know I would be here now?

I take a box from the rack, walk with it to the cash desk and pay for it. Then I quickly drive home.

I spend my time pacing up and down the room. Suddenly, I hear helicopters flying over the house. I freeze. *Is the secret service looking for me?*

'Click', the sound of the lid of my letterbox interrupts my thoughts. The Amnesty International magazine lands on my doormat. I pick it up cautiously. There's a picture of a little Twitter bird in a cage on the front cover.

See, that's because I sent that tweet about Snowden! I have to be careful what I tweet, that's why the Twitter bird is in a cage! I'm better off going to Russia with Noah in a while to talk to Snowden in person.

At half past three I drive to Noah's school to pick him up. In the playground, the father of one of Noah's friends winks at me. He's wearing a black denim jacket.

Does he work for the secret service?

Then I see a procession of children walking down the long staircase. I smile when I see Noah's face.

'Hi darling. You know it's Bart's swimming party this evening, don't you?'

'Oh yes,' replies Noah. 'Have you bought a present yet?'

'Yes, this morning.'

We get into my car.

'Mummy, I want a little brother,' he says from the back seat.

'Honey, Mummy and Daddy are divorced, that's not possible. Mummy doesn't have a boyfriend, so I can't give you another little brother or sister. Plus, I could get sick again if I have another baby. And you can also play with Sylvia's children, can't you? With Caroline and Olaf?'

'I still want a little brother.'

I decide to try and distract Noah.

'Noah, tell me about school. How was it?'

'Fine.'

'Did you have fun?'

'Yeah.'

'And did you play with Richard?'

'Yes. I sat next to him. We drew a picture about the summer.'

'That's nice.'

'His father's in the secret police,' Noah continues.

'Oh?' I answer, and ask him as calmly as possible: 'But he's not allowed to tell you that, is he?'

'He told me himself,' Noah answers calmly.

'Oh,' I say, without going into it any further.

How terrible! Now the secret service is keeping an eye on my child!

My thoughts keep going round in circles as we drive home.

When we arrive home, I first give Noah a drink and a chocolate biscuit. Then he sits down on the couch to play a computer game. I

still have some energy. I take this opportunity to put on the Jungle Book CD to entertain Noah. Bagheera the black panther tells the story of Mowgli, the boy who grew up in the Indian jungle with a family of wolves.

‘Listen, Noah. Mowgli is being brought back to the humans by Bagheera. They’re on their way there and are spending the night in the jungle in a tree. Mowgli wants to go to sleep. And then the snake comes along. Hissss.’

On the CD there’s a croaky female voice singing: *‘Look at me, stare at me... think of me... sleep as deep as you can...’*

‘That snake’s not nice, Mummy.’

‘No, definitely not nice. What a disgusting beast that snake is.’

I immediately turn off the music. Noah goes off to watch television. I pace up and down through the living room. I’m horrified by the terrible snake. I hate it!

Why do I hate the snake so much? I must have been Eve. The snake chased me and Adam out of paradise!

While Noah is watching television, I start putting the dirty dishes into the dishwasher to relax me. I’ve got a lot of energy but at the same time I’m also very tired and have difficulty concentrating. That’s why I’m glad I don’t have to cook and that Noah will be getting chips at the party.

In the evening, when we’re in the swimming pool café for the party, Noah takes my medicine out of my handbag and holds the pillbox up in front of my face: ‘I want you to take your medicine again, Mummy.’ I’m bewildered.

Noah wants me to start taking my medication again. It is an order from him, he was forced to say that by the secret service. I will take the medication for my son, even if I die from it.

Trembling, I open the white pillbox. It’s empty.

'Noah, are you coming to get changed?' the birthday boy asks.

'Yes, I'm coming,' says Noah. He follows the birthday boy. Soon, all the other children at the party follow them.

I have to get my medication, Noah wants me to.

'I'm just going home to get something,' I mumble to the birthday boy's mother. She looks at me and wants to say something.

Go now, says the voice of the secret service in my head. So I quickly walk out of the door of the swimming pool without saying another word.

Like a maniac I race home in my car. I've still got my coat on. I rush to the bathroom and look frantically for my medication in the topmost untidy drawer of the white cupboard next to the sink.

Take them, says the voice in my head. I take the pills out of the box, place them on my hand and swallow them with a big mouthful of water.

'For you, Noah,' I say out loud as I put the cup down.

Then I walk out of the bathroom quickly, go down the stairs and jump back into the car.

I drive back to the swimming pool at top speed.

Get a move on, the secret service says in my head in a compelling tone.

In a narrow street I overtake another car, tyres screeching. The driver honks his horn.

When I get back to the pool, the children are in the swimming pool. The mother of the birthday boy is now surrounded by other parents. I go and sit next to her. Opposite me sits a woman wearing a scarf with a panther pattern.

A panther pattern! She's a panther from the secret service and has the strength and power to kill me! She is guarding over me, if I do or say

something wrong she will kill me. Noah is too young for that and he loves me too much.

'Do you come here often?' she asks me.

'Uhm... Yes... yes... We come here often,' I answer, tense and confused.

It's quiet for a moment.

'Would you like something to drink?' asks the birthday boy's mother.

'No, no... thank you,' I stammer.

The minutes seem to last hours. The woman with the panther scarf is now talking to the woman next to her. I hold my breath. As long as she doesn't look at me. At a certain point I see my father and my sister entering the swimming pool out of the corner of my eye. I look up in amazement. They live a long way away and I didn't know they were coming.

'Hi May, we were wondering how you were,' my sister greets me. Her voice sounds concerned.

'Shall we sit somewhere else for a while?' I suggest. I don't want to attract any attention.

We sit down at a long table a little further up in the swimming pool café, where it's a bit quieter. Behind the glass is a large empty gymnasium.

'How's it going now?' my father asks. He pulls at the tuft of hair on the side of his head, as he always does when he's thinking about something or is worried.

'Good, good,' I mumble, confused, as I fix my gaze on the table with the birthday boy's parents.

The woman with the panther scarf is looking at us. All the people at the party are keeping an eye on me.

'We think it would be better if you were admitted,' proposes Famke, worried.

'No, I don't want to. And I want you to leave now,' I say, ashamed.

'Really May, it's better for you,' my sister adds.

'I don't want to. And I'm going back to the party,' I say as I get up to go back to the group. Disappointed, my father and sister leave the swimming pool.

I walk back to the group. Fortunately, the woman with the panther scarf is sitting somewhere else. She continues to keep an eye on me from a distance, but she is no longer a big threat. As well as I can, for the rest of the party I try to concentrate on what the birthday boy's mother tells me.

The party's almost over when Vince appears in the doorway of the swimming pool. He looks around, then he sees me and walks towards me.

'Noah's sleeping with me tonight,' he says resolutely. I approve. Not that Vince is waiting for my answer, he's used to being listened to.

'The babysitter's coming tomorrow to take Noah to get his passport. You can come along.'

'I'd like that,' I answer, timidly.

When the party's over and Noah is dressed and has joined us, his hair still wet, Vince says: 'Come on Noah, give Mummy a hug. You're coming home with me tonight.'

Noah and I give each other a hug. Then Noah follows his father out of the swimming pool.

When I get home, the house feels empty without Noah. In the living room I search through the big stack of CDs in the CD tower for music to dance to. It's been a long time – perhaps years – since I put on music just for myself. I choose *Licence to Kill* from the James Bond film, the CD I bought when I was previously admitted to the

Rembrandthof. I place the CD carefully in the simple CD player resting on the green trunk from Indonesia. As soon as I hear the first notes of the song, I start dancing with enthusiasm and get into it more and more. At one point I start dancing as if I were a spy myself wanting to seduce a fellow spy – President Putin. I don't want him to use his *licence to kill*. *I don't want anyone to be killed. I want love on earth*. I hold the pole in the living room as if I were performing a passionate dance of love for my invisible fellow spy, Putin, who is standing in the corner of the room, and I swing around it. The tears slide down my cheeks until the music fades out softly. I start to sob. I press repeat to hear the song one more time and dance with everything I have in me. When the music is over I turn off the lights and go upstairs to bed.

The babysitter will be coming tomorrow to pick up Noah's passport with me. Although the medication isn't able to prevent my approaching psychosis immediately, it still makes me fall asleep.

POISONED

The next morning, I'm awake in good time.

Today is an important day. We are about to collect Noah's passport from the town hall. We are the proud inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, of Bussum!

I walk down the stairs and take the newspaper out of the letterbox. Then I prepare my breakfast and open the newspaper. I notice an article about the ongoing war in Syria and the civilian victims there. I start to cry. Just at that moment, Noah and Nathalie arrive. I open the door, making a half-hearted attempt to wipe away my tears.

'Hi May...' says Nathalie cheerfully, until she sees my face.

'Are you all right?' asks Nathalie.

'Why is there war? I so want the world to be more beautiful,' I say to her, crying.

'Mummy, are you alright?' Noah asks.

Nathalie tries to reassure me. In an unsteady voice she says: 'Everything's going to be all right, May,' handing me a tissue. While I wipe away my tears, we walk to her car.

In the car, on our way to the town hall, I start crying again.

'Sorry, sorry,' I stammer.

'It doesn't matter,' Nathalie answers, but I can hear some concern in her voice.

At the town hall I feel a little bit better. It's our turn soon and the three of us get Noah's passport. Nathalie then drops me off at my house and takes Noah to Daddy's house.

A few hours later, Vince calls me with a brief message: 'Nathalie was very shocked by your behaviour. Noah will be staying with me for the time being.' Vince's firm tone of voice combined with my vulnerability cause me to accept his pronouncement immediately. Intuitively I feel that this is better for Noah.

To fill the void of missing Noah, I decide to bring a pile of glossy magazines about Iran to a hotel close to where I used to work; the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. I get into my car and hand over the glossies to the receptionist in the hotel lobby. Now I want to go home again. In theory, it's a road I'm familiar with, because I worked there for years. It's already dark. I drive along the Boelelaan. I look for the access road to the motorway.

I don't know this road. Is the driver of that black car watching me? That car belongs to the secret service and black stands for death. A licence to kill.

A red car overtakes me.

Thank goodness, a red car, the secret service is protecting me. Where am I now?

I keep driving around aimlessly for minutes. Finally, I turn my satnav on. It looks like there's a diversion. After driving around for half an hour, I see that I'm parked in front of the University Medical

Centre of the *Vrije Universiteit*. I switch off the engine and sit quietly for a moment.

This is where Wouter Bos works! I'm Eve. He's Adam! The secret service have led me here for a reason. So I've really been bugged and followed by the secret service for several years. Wouter was a political leader of the Dutch Labour party at the time, so he's sure to know more about it. All political leaders are informed in the Hush-hush committee about what the secret service is doing. Wouter can help me! But it's evening now, so I'm sure he's not here.

I start my car again and continue my way home. On the motorway I pass the tall office buildings of the 'Zuidas'. I'm back on the road I'm familiar with. I arrive home again, after taking some detours.

As I turn the key in the lock of my front door I see that the lights of my house are on and that the door is on the latch. I ring the doorbell and my mother opens the door. 'Yoo-hoo, we're here,' she shouts, taking the bolt off the door. I take off my coat and walk into the living room. My mother's partner, Frans, is there too.

Frans! So the secret service is here! He's wearing his red woollen jumper. Red means that he's vigilant.

'Famke called me to say she couldn't get hold of you. We're worried about you, that's why I'm staying here with you tonight,' my mother says as she unpacks a colourful bunch of flowers that she picked from her garden. I see her suitcase in a corner of the room, as well as the multicoloured shopping bag containing all kinds of goodies for me.

'OK. Then let's eat at the pizzeria tonight. There's no food in the house,' I mumble.

We go to the pizzeria I've been eating at for a long time. I went there with Vince when I was pregnant with Noah. The restaurant had just opened then. We are greeted by the nice waiter who always welcomes us and who has known Noah since he was born.

'Good evening. Welcome. We've got a nice table for you,' says the waiter, showing us to the table.

'What would you like to drink?' he asks as soon as we're seated.

'I'd like a glass of sparkling water,' says my mother.

'A beer for me, please,' her husband adds.

'And you, what would you like to drink?' I hear a voice saying. There are many noises. Someone slides his chair over the floor. Several people are talking at once.

'The waiter's asking what you'd like to drink, May-May,' I now hear my mother say.

'Sparkling water,' I stammer.

'Fine, I'll be right back,' says the waiter, and walks off. When my coat falls off my chair onto the floor, a woman picks it up for me.

She is an angel! There are a few angels among the people trying to help me. That young man with dark blonde hair sitting at a table a little further along has a magical aura about him. He must be an angel too.

The waiter arrives with the drinks and we tell him what we would like to eat. My mother and Frans start a discussion about the birthday of one of Frans' sisters. Frans coughs.

I was right, he's having a hard time with all those angels around him, because he's from the secret service! The secret service cannot cooperate with angels!

My mother and Frans continue talking. I keep a close eye on Frans, and listen carefully to see if he makes a slip-up to reveal that he works for the secret service. But Frans is on his guard. He looks at me from time to time and he doesn't slip up. Our food is brought to us quickly. My mother and I ordered pasta with salmon and Frans a pizza with salami. The food doesn't appeal to me, but I still eat it.

'Sorry, I have to go to the toilet,' I apologise. As I'm sitting on the toilet and reaching for a comb from my handbag, the keyring my

mother gave me catches my eye. She works at a mental health institution. *Parnassia* is inscribed on it in colourful letters. I hear the voices of Bert Koenders and Wouter Bos in my head.

When the police find your bag, they will see that you are connected to the mental health institution, says Bert.

Hmm, I think. I won't be taken seriously then because nobody takes psychiatric patients seriously. And Frans is sure to have put a bug in the keyring!

You have to get rid of that keyring, Bert and Wouter say in unison.

I take the keyring off my keys, wrap it in toilet paper and throw it into the waste bin in the toilet. When I return to the table, Frans says: 'Shall we go home?'

He has noticed that I have got rid of the bug device! He is furious, but he manages to hide his feelings well.

Frans pays the bill and we walk past the tables to the exit. The nice waiter politely holds the door open for us. I don't have the energy to say goodbye to him.

A little later, we enter my white house. Frans walks to the kitchen to make tea. His footsteps sound harsh on the parquet floor. My mother fiddles about in her shopping bag that's in the living room. The kettle has boiled. Frans first makes a cup of tea for my mother and then one for me.

He must have put poison in mine, because I removed the bugging device, there's a penalty for that. The death penalty, flits through my mind. I don't flinch, look at the watery brown liquid in the cup, which is coloured red inside. I take a big sip of my tea. Frans looks at me.

He must be perplexed that I've drunk the tea while he'd put poison in it!

When I have finished the tea, he goes home. He has done what he had to do. I watch him give my mother a kiss on her mouth. When he walks up to me to say goodbye I walk away. Saying goodbye to my killer is going too far.

My mother insists on sleeping on the couch, although I tell her I would sleep upstairs in the attic so that she can sleep in my bed. She has put her black shoes on the stairs. This is a sign for evildoers that they are not allowed to walk up the stairs. She's protecting me, her child. However, there is something she does not know.

Frans has poisoned my tea, there is a chance that I won't wake up tomorrow.

I walk to my white country-style wardrobe in my bedroom. Lying at the back, in among the jumbled piles of clothes, is my beautiful white airy summer dress. It's the dress I wore on my honeymoon. I want to die looking beautiful. Exhausted, I put it on. The white fabric falls smoothly around my body, which has become thinner since then. I walk to the attic and fall asleep on the spare bed.

COMPULSORY ADMISSION IN THE REMBRANDTHOF

When I wake up the next morning, I open my eyes and realise that I'm in the attic.

I'm still alive! I've survived the poison!

Next to my bed, I see short wooden sticks lying in a circle on the ground.

Frans has laid down wooden sticks. Wooden sticks... I'm a king's daughter!

I get out of bed and walk towards the stairs. The beige-and-black checked tea towel with black sheep hanging over the balustrade in the stairwell catches my eye. Black sheep.

Frans hung that tea towel there. He thinks he's a black sheep! That means he has realised that he wanted to kill a king's daughter. The tea towel is proof!

I know I mustn't tell my mother about this terrible act that Frans has committed, I don't want to make her unhappy. I walk to my bedroom, take off my light white summer dress and put on a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved shirt.

When I arrive downstairs, my mother is setting the table. She prepares a small bowl of yoghurt and muesli for me. At breakfast I hardly say anything. I shiver, I'm cold because I barely slept.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' my mother asks.

'No,' I mumble, resignedly.

Frans wanted to kill me! It didn't work, I was stronger than the poison. Mum clearly doesn't know anything about it.

'May-May, I'm going off to work soon. I told them I'd be coming in a bit late. What are you going to do today?'

'Oh. Something for myself,' I murmur.

'Famke and Walter are dropping in to see you this afternoon.'

'Fine,' I answer curtly.

I would love to tell her that her husband had tried to kill me, but I feel too weak to say it. Plus the fact that the secret service doesn't allow that. I spend the afternoon walking in circles around the coffee table in the living room.

At the end of the afternoon, my sister and her husband Walter arrive. Their faces look solemn, but that barely registers with me.

'We're worried about you. That's why we asked the Rembrandthof if they could send someone over.'

'What!? Behind my back?' I blurt out.

'I'm really worried about you, May,' says Famke tenderly. The doorbell rings.

A big man with a long sand-coloured ponytail and a young woman are standing at the door.

'Hello, may we come in?' asks the psychiatrist.

'OK,' I answer weakly, stepping aside to let them in.

I arrange several chairs for the guests, including a large black baroque chair.

The black chair is the chair for Bert. The secret service wants Bert and I to achieve peace together. Bert is now in Mali leading a UN mission. He could arrive at any minute so his chair has to be ready for him. Sitting on this chair gives you the power to kill, which is why only Bert is allowed to sit on that chair.

The black chair remains unoccupied.

‘How are you doing?’ asks the psychiatrist.

‘I’m not allowed...’

The female trainee psychiatrist asks in a friendly caring tone ‘What aren’t you allowed to do?’.

‘Talk,’ I whisper, looking down at the floor.

‘You’re not allowed to talk? Why not? Who says so?’ The sincere warmth in her voice moves me to answer.

‘The secret service,’ I answer.

You know you can’t mention our name.

‘And why wouldn’t the secret service allow you to talk?’ she asks. For a moment I hesitate about giving an answer. She is so friendly. But I’ve said far too much already. I hear the voice of the secret service in my head once more.

How we work is a state secret.

‘Your sister told me that you’ve reduced your dosage of medication. Maybe it’s a good idea to increase it again?’ says the psychiatrist.

Don’t say a word, the voice of the secret service warns me.

‘May is suffering from the side effects of the medication,’ says Famke in the end.

'Perhaps it's an idea to discuss trying another antipsychotic with your doctor,' continues the psychiatrist.

'Yes, I think that's a good idea too,' replies my sister.

'Fine, I think we'll leave it at that then,' concludes the psychiatrist.

'Thanks for coming,' says Famke.

The psychiatrist and trainee psychiatrist leave the room.

'I thought it was very clever of you to get my sister to answer that she wasn't allowed to talk about the secret service,' I hear Famke saying as she sees them to the door. Her words barely register with me. When the care providers have gone, Famke and Walter also go home and I'm on my own again.

I put on a nightgown and go to bed. I lie wide awake in bed.

May-May, I'm coming to see you, says a voice to me via telepathy.

Bert! I think, in delight.

Soon I feel his lips against mine and I am kissing him, the sheet, passionately. I stroke his hair through the air with my hand.

How I love you Bert! I can't wait to meet you for real!

Suddenly I feel the presence of someone else... Wouter. Bert and Wouter are friends.

Wouter, how nice that you're here too, I call out.

Yes, I was curious to know how you were doing.

Wouter, what's the best way to save the world, do you think? I ask.

Let's see how things develop, he answers. I laugh out loud in the middle of the night at this pun that is going on in my head.

I love you too, Wouter, I whisper out loud in my room. I am no longer alone. In fact, I feel I am the chosen one in the company of the two men I love so much. The two men with whom we are going to achieve world peace.

It's because of us, the secret service, and our efforts, that the three of you are here together, says a voice of the secret service.

Oh, how can we thank you? I ask.

We love the creation, the source, says the voice of the secret service.

I understand what the secret service means. I know they are behind the mirror in my bathroom. They can also look at the bed in my bedroom through that mirror through the wall.

Elegantly, I take the blankets off the bed and pull my nightgown up to my hips. Then I take off my panties and put them to one side. After that I spread my legs so they can see my 'Bambi'. I open her up completely.

Well done, this is what we love. It's a reward for our work, says the voice of the secret service.

Then I discreetly pull my nightgown back down and put my panties back on. As the hours go by, I also begin to feel the presence of Martin, a boy I secretly fell in love with in secondary school. I smile when I think of him.

I feel love for so many people, that I'm sure I must be Eve as well as Aphrodite, the goddess of love! I – Aphrodite – make love to the sheet on my bed and I'm in seventh heaven. Suddenly, from one moment to the next, I rush from euphoric love to an enormous fear of death.

Frans tried to kill me! I have to turn him in.

That's why I get up, even though I didn't get a wink of sleep that night. I walk to my study and start up the computer. On Sunday October 6, at 5.15 a.m., I send a mail to myself so that the secret service can read it, because they are spying on me: *My suggestion is that Frans first confesses his sin to my mother.* I send a cc to a member of the Senate of the PvdA with whom I was in contact the previous month concerning the Prostitution Regulation Act. He is involved with the law, so he will ensure that the secret service adheres to the law.

An hour and a half later – at 6.31 a.m. – the thought comes to me that it's important to inform the king and queen. After all, the king is the Head of State, the secret service falls under him. I also think that the secret service has deleted a neighbour's memories of me. The secret service is spying on me, so I don't really have to email the king, but I *can* email myself. That's why I send an email to myself containing the following text:

Dear all,

I would like to advise Willem-Alexander and Máxima to make sure that the secret service does not kill any more people, erase memories, and so on. God loves everyone.

In addition, Wouter, Bert and I would like to meet you. However, as Wouter said, we are showing how 'things develop'. 😊

See you soon,

May-May

After sending the email, I return to the bedroom. I can't get to sleep so I get dressed. I choose a creamy white T-shirt made of organza. It is an angelic fabric, a sign that I am connected to heaven.

TO THE REMBRANDTHOF

About half an hour later – it's now seven o'clock in the morning – the doorbell rings. I rush down the stairs.

'Hello, how are you?' asks Vince, as I open the door.

'Fine. Come in,' I mumble absent-mindedly.

Vince is here because we were each other's great love. He also wants world peace. Today is the day I meet Bert and that's why he's coming to see me off.

'Your sister called me and asked me to see how you were doing.'

I ignore what Vince says.

'Shall we go for a walk? I'd like some fresh air,' I say.

'A walk? OK, if that's what you want,' replies Vince in amazement.

I walk towards the coat rack. I choose my black jacket to show the secret service that it doesn't matter to me if they want to kill me. I won't let them blackmail me.

A little later we cross the streets in the direction of the heathland. A cycle path runs along the edges of the heathland. When we are on the heathland, I hear Bert's voice by telepathy.

We will meet soon, May-May.

'Yes, Bert. I look forward to seeing you,' I murmur.

'Who are you talking to?' asks Vince.

'Oh, it doesn't matter,' I say.

Further on, in the middle of the heathland, I notice a man who, from a distance, seems to be kneeling in front of his son. That must be a sign from the secret service that I was taking my medication because my son asked me to that time we were at the swimming pool. The secret service considers you to be extremely weak if you, as a parent, listen to your child.

Maybe that's why the secret service wants to kill me. After all, I'm just an ordinary mortal. If only I hadn't put on my black coat.

A feeling of terror causes me to crouch down in fear.

In a worried voice, Vince asks, 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing, nothing,' I answer hastily.

The fear subsides a little. I hear Bert's voice again.

We will achieve peace together, he says to me.

'Yes, yes. It's important that there is world peace, Bert,' I mumble softly again.

Vince and I continue our walk over the heathland. Bert and I carry on talking to each other.

When we're back home and Vince is standing by the door, before leaving, he says firmly and decisively:

'I want you to take your medication again or to be admitted, otherwise I'll have your parental rights taken away from you!'

I close the front door gently.

Vince wants to deprive me of my parental rights!

My throat is dry. I have to do something. Quickly I grab my laptop, place it on the dining table and open it up. I send an email to Jim, Professor of Psychiatry in Maastricht, asking if I can speak to him. He mails me back within an hour, telling me that he's in Barcelona all week and is busy. He also indicates that it's better to consult with family in a constructive manner, as well as with a professional counsellor who knows me well.

Why isn't Jim here? He can be trusted. The other psychiatrists don't understand me. They want to put me on medication... they think I'm ill. Jim understands what it's like to hear that you have schizophrenia... how incredibly serious the side effects of the medicines are.

I walk in circles around the coffee table in the room. The minutes and hours go by. I have no idea what time it is when I hear the doorbell again. When I open the door, my sister and brother-in-law are standing in front of me.

'It's good to see you again, May,' my sister says as she walks in. My brother-in-law follows her. I don't answer.

'Have you eaten anything today?' Famke asks me when she's in the living room.'

I stare at the ground.

'Don't know. I'm cold.'

'It'll be all right,' says Famke, stroking my arm.

'The secret service wants me to go to the Rembrandthof,' I tell Famke quietly. Famke and Walter exchange glances.

'I think that's a good idea,' replies Walter quickly.

'I'll grab some clothes for you,' says my sister as she walks upstairs. A little later, she's back with my blue trolley case.

'I've got pyjamas, clean underwear, trousers, a T-shirt and socks. In this section are your glasses case, lens solution, deodorant, brush, toothpaste and toothbrush. Is that enough, do you think?'

I nod blankly.

The three of us get into Famke's car. We drive along the road that leads from Bussum to the Rembrandthof. My sister knows the way. When I see the tower of the Sint Vituskerk in the distance and we drive around the roundabout, I start to cry.

'What's the matter?' Famke asks.

'I miss Valerie,' I say, sobbing.

'Valerie? That blonde girl you met during your last admission?'

'Yes, Bob told me she died. She's the one who helped me with my faith in Christ.'

'Oh, how terribly sad that she's dead,' says Famke.

A little later, we're parked by the light-yellow building of the Rembrandthof. Bert Koenders calls my name via telepathy.

May-May, May-May.

I run off as hard as I can so I can hear his voice better. Famke and Walter are left standing.

May-May, I love you. Peace will really come.

'I have to go to the Rembrandthof now, Bert,' I say out loud.

That's all right. Wouter will help you too.

'Fine. I love you both.' I walk slowly back to Famke and Walter.

'Where did you go all of a sudden?' Walter asks in amazement.

'Oh, just away from here for a while,' I mumble. They are not allowed to know anything about my contact with Bert and Wouter. Walter also works for the secret service. I don't know what the role of the secret service is exactly. They get in my way because they use

violence in their work. I have to keep my thoughts hidden from the outside world, while trying to pick up signals from Bert and Wouter.

We walk into the Rembrandthof and go through to a lower part of the large overgrown courtyard. There are stairs going up to the clinics. Hardly anyone can see us, we are closed off from the outside world. I am as closed as an oyster.

‘What are you thinking about?’ Famke asks me.

‘About the news.’ About the D66 leader Alexander Pechtold. PVV supporters who gave the Hitler salute.’ And at that very moment, I can feel the spirit of Hitler.

I ask forgiveness for everything I've done. Please forgive me.

Alarmed by this, I tell my sister.

‘I can feel the spirit of Hitler.’ As I say this, a woman rushes out of the clinic as if she is responding to Hitler’s name.

It was a trap set by Hitler! He wanted me to say his name out loud so that she would feel his power and come outside!

The woman has big eyes and looks fatigued. I feel an enormous negative energy approaching me and I run towards her. As I stand face to face with the woman, she says: ‘You, you are Lucia!’ I get the feeling that she wants to steal my heart. My heart jumps up, as if it is being ripped out of my chest. I look at her enraged, I am a panther – trained by the secret service – and I growl at her.

‘You,’ she yells at me, a little more softly this time. My growling has scared her.

‘I’m protecting the world!’

‘You... you,’ she now repeats gently.

She continues to look at me. I don’t feel at ease. She has a lot of negative power.

‘GO!’ I shout at her. She continues to look at me, but she is clearly frightened. She is shaking. Eventually a nurse arrives and takes her away. A fellow patient with short black hair has been watching us from a bench. He must work for the secret service.

Someone grabs me by my arm and another nurse leads me to a courtyard close to a solitary cell. I jump up onto a wooden table so that I can stand higher, closer to God. I stand proud and stretch out my arms to the heavens so that I can receive God’s power as quickly and optimally as possible. Walter comes up to stand by my side. His contacts with the secret service are putting me in a difficult situation.

‘May-May, can you come down?’ the nurse asks me. I ignore her request. I remain standing on the table with my arms spread in the direction of heaven. I am trying to contact Christ.

‘Can you ask her to come down?’ the nurse asks my sister. *He is obviously from the other side. He’s not one of us!* Famke keeps her eyes focused on me. *Fortunately, Fam doesn’t do what he asks.* She loves me. Our sisterly love triumphs.

I remain standing on the table. The nurse grabs my leg. I start to growl, first softly, then harder and harder. I’m in contact with God, but the secret service’s black panther is still inside me. I again become that raging panther, causing Famke’s eyes to widen and forcing her to take a step backwards. The nurse also steps back. I remain standing, all my muscles at stretching point.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

All of a sudden, five Rembrandthof nurses come rushing in from all directions. They grab me and drag me to the solitary cell. I resist with all my might – I cling to a doorpost – but they do their absolute best and are stronger than me. The very instant that I'm put into the solitary cell, the bells of the Sint Vituskerk start to ring.

Christ will stand by me!

And then a request to pray from a mosque sounds in my head.

The Muslims also support me... This will be a battle for the survival of the earth. Or for its destruction, as the evil powers will have it.

I'm ordered to take off my clothes and remove my lenses. I am given a wide anti-suicide smock to wear. I also have to take off the blue necklace containing a tanzanite gem that Noah gave me for Mother's Day. Without that necklace the spirits have free rein. The heavy cell door of the solitary confinement cell closes. I am hermetically sealed off. A sweet little voice emerges from my innermost depths:

Mummy, I'm here. I'm with you, in your heart.

Of course, it's Noah, my son. He's always with me. Even when he's not. The negative forces are incredibly powerful. So powerful that they force me to lie down on the bed. Fighting while lying on a bed is the most difficult thing to do. Fragments from Madonna's video *secretprojectrevolution* come to mind. *'I send you love. We are all on this ship together. I send you love.'*

I feel love and radiate love. *'I send you love. We are all on this ship together. We are all on this ship together,'* I repeat. I send love to everyone. Everyone belongs, even the evil ones – as long as they keep quiet – that's the only way we can all survive. The forces of evil keep beating down on me and I continue sending love. After spending hours fighting on the bed, I hear the door opening.

'May-May, do you want to come out for a while?' asks Madelon. We take a seat in the hall. Across from me, in another solitary confinement cell, sits a man. I can hear him screaming. He is in contact with evil. He pounds on the door. He is furious because he has not yet succeeded in having the earth destroyed. I can feel his negative energy, it flows under the door of his solitary confinement cell. Madelon and the other nurse offer me water. I don't drink it. It has been poisoned by the man across the way. He had himself admitted when he heard that I was coming to the Rembrandthof. Here – far from the outside world and in a place where spirits gather – they want to eliminate me and have the earth destroyed. I avoid looking at Madelon and the other nurse. I don't trust them anymore. A little later they bring me back to the solitary confinement cell. Meekly, I allow myself to be carried away.

It seems that the evil forces are diminishing and I manage to sit on the green pouf in my cell. Here on the green pouf, I feel the negative forces less strongly. *'We are all on this ship together,'* I keep repeating to myself, just to be sure. After a couple of hours, I have to pee. I pee in the cardboard bedpan. Suddenly I hear a pounding on the cell door opposite me again.

The evil is still there. And it is strong. The man in the cell opposite me was outside just now. When he was outside, he invoked all the evil forces and

poisoned all the water on earth. My pee is the only pure water left on earth. The only way I can make the water pure again is if I am allowed outside and can seek contact with God. But I do not know how long that will take. If they flush my pee away and I have to drink new water from the tap, there will be no pure water left at all. So if I want to save the earth, there's only one thing to do. Drink my own pee!

I put the cardboard bedpan against my lips and gulp the yellow liquid down at lightning speed to save the earth. I don't smell or taste the urine.

When the cardboard bedpan is empty, I return to the green pouf, my beacon of safety. After several hours – I have no idea what time it is – I need to pee again. The urine splashes a little against my legs. I still haven't been outside. And once again this enormous fear creeps up on me – I am the only one who can save the earth, by drinking my pee. I start drinking again. When I've drunk half of it, the door opens: 'Yuk, May-May. There's no need for you to do that,' says Madelon as she grabs the cardboard bedpan out of my hands. She throws the urine away in the toilet next to the cell. I'm anxious that the earth will now be destroyed, but also relieved. Madelon leaves and the cell door closes again behind me.

Moments later a nurse comes in. It's Arjen, I recognise him from my previous compulsory admission. Apparently, Madelon and the other nurse have gone home. 'OK, I'll take away the pouf so that you have a bit more space,' he says.

He must have been looking at the monitor and seen that the pouf gives me some support. It's all part of the evil forces.

Arjen acts immediately and rolls the pouf down the corridor. I'm far too weak to protest. I don't have the courage or the ability to say anything. I'm terrified. Terrified. And I am fighting a battle. A battle to save the earth. Moments later, the cell door closes again. I lie exhausted on the bed. The negative forces are coming down on me hard. I'm almost suffocating.

'Love. Love. I'm sending you love,' I mumble. The negative forces keep pushing down hard on me.

'We are all on this ship together,' I shout.

The negative forces are making me feel that they want to destroy the earth. They press down on me even harder.

'We are all on this ship together, we are all on this ship together.'

I can hardly breathe.

Think of love.

I visualise a baby and a puppy. I am holding the power of love. It is a struggle for survival, for keeping the earth alive. I continue to think of love until the morning.

When the cell door opens again and the day has begun, the evil forces are gone. The man that was sitting in the cell opposite me looks defeated. He is small and pale. I walk up to him to offer him a hand. As he shakes my hand he murmurs: 'A new day has come after all.'

He was very angry with me, or more precisely, with my love for God, the love in me. That's why he wanted to destroy me and have the earth destroyed. But it didn't succeed. Love has overcome.

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

I am taken to my bedroom on the closed ward. It's a simple room and looks the same as the ones on the voluntary admissions ward. There's a bed with a yellow-orange bedspread, a simple wooden table and chair, a white wardrobe made of wood, and a toilet and shower behind a white door. The blue trolley case that my sister brought with her is in one corner of the room.

Just as I'm leaving to go to the living room to have breakfast, my neighbour comes out of his room. He's a tall man with a slightly bent posture, with scruffy short dark brown hair. He could be a student. He looks at me, with a dreamy gaze, maybe he hears voices just like me.

'Hello,' he says softly.

'Hello,' I answer. 'I'm May-May.'

He looks at me for a moment and his eyes take on a softer appearance. Then he gently reaches his hand out to me and moves his face a little closer. As if he is looking for love and wants to give me a kiss. I take a step backwards. He turns around in anger and goes back to his room. The door slams shut. I walk away, startled.

I walk along the long white corridors to the living room. In the living room, a few fellow patients are having breakfast. I introduce myself to an elderly woman with dark blonde curly hair and a flower in her hair. Her name is Tinie. Next to her is a woman with short hair in different shades of grey. She introduces herself to me as Martine. She looks very 'normal'. At another table I see a boy with dreamy eyes. Suddenly I recognise the face of the man with black hair who was sitting outside on the bench when a fellow patient stormed out. He is sitting with the boy with dreamy eyes at one of the four round tables. I go and sit next to them.

'Hello, I'm May-May,' I say.

'I'm Jack,' says the boy with the dreamy eyes. The secret service man says nothing.

Of course, the secret service people don't mention their names.

I take a slice of dark brown bread and spread butter on it. As usual, my breakfast consists of a brown bread sandwich with pure chocolate sprinkles. Our breakfast is over quickly.

'I don't feel well,' says the man with black hair.

'Oh, that's really awful for you,' I answer.

'What if you go and do something about it,' he says to me.

I look at him. *He works for the secret service. At the secret service they love having everything neat and tidy. They also attach a lot of value to small gestures. What could I do for him?* A withered bunch of yellow daffodils catches my eye. I can see some flowers in between that are still fresh. I pick up the bunch of flowers, walk to the open kitchen, take out the dead flowers and throw them away. I cut off the rotten stems of the flowers that are still good.

'Just for you,' I say as I put the vase back.

'Thank you, I feel better already,' he answers.

Everyone puts their plates and cups into the dishwasher after they've eaten. Martine cleans the tables with a cleaning cloth. After I've put my things into the dishwasher I turn on the radio and start dancing.

'Billie Jean, is not my lover, she's just a girl who claims that I am the one,' I sing along exuberantly to the music. I love dancing and like looking sexy; I like breaking out of the hospital routine. When Martine has finished her chores, she joins in with me.

'This is great,' says Martine.

Jack is watching us. At that moment, the psychiatrist also walks past, takes a look in the living room and goes back to the office. When the song is over, Martine and I sit down on the couch. We turn the music down again.

'Dancing is wonderful,' Martine says with a sigh. 'God must love dancing,' she adds.

'May-May, I'm going into the town centre, can I bring something back for you?' asks Martine once we've recovered our breath.

'Oh yes, a blue binder please,' I murmur.

'Fine, I'll get that for you,' says Martine as she walks out of the room.

At that same moment, a short slimly built woman with fluffy dark brown hair walks into the kitchen from the corridor. She has missed breakfast and puts the kettle on. 'Allora, allora,' she exclaims angrily.

'That's Lucia, she's Italian,' Jack informs me.

Lucia. She was the one the woman in the courtyard garden was looking for when I had just been admitted. She is in contact with the evil forces.

'She's been chasing me for centuries,' sighs Jack. I try to get away every time, but it doesn't work.'

In the kitchen, the water has boiled. Lucia pours hot water into a cup, puts a teabag in it and sits down on the couch in the living room.

‘Are you coming outside too?’ Jack asks me.

We walk through the living room door into the patio. There’s a wooden garden shed here now and they’ve planted pink and blue hydrangeas. And there’s also a miniature apple tree in the green strip near the windows of the patients’ bedrooms. Jack sits down on the wooden table. I can see the white skin of his back peeping out from under his clothes. He stares out in front of him with a dreamy gaze, just like an angel. I look at the book he has brought with him. He sees me looking at it.

‘This book describes important developments,’ he says as he leafs through it. In one of the photographs I see the attack on the Twin Towers. I was at Ground Zero in New York with Vince a few months after the attack.

‘Look, this piece is about Einstein. He helped the Americans develop an atom bomb when he was actually a pacifist.’

Albert Einstein, he wants peace.

Jack continues flipping through the book.

A new voice starts to sound in my head, the voice of Albert Einstein.

I will help you.

Wonderful, Mr Einstein, I say telepathically to Albert Einstein.

‘Are you familiar with Nostradamus?’ asks Jack.

‘Huh?’ I answer.

‘Are you familiar with Nostradamus?’

‘I’ve heard of him,’ I mumble.

'Nostradamus made many predictions for the future. I think a lot about the future,' mumbles Jack. He stares straight ahead of him. I want to carry on talking with Einstein, so I get up and walk out of the patio through the living room to the end of the long white corridor where my room is located.

When I get to my room, I turn the key in the lock and enter the room. I pace back and forth across the small space and look at the yellow linoleum on the floor. At the same time, I try to feel and hear if Einstein is saying anything. It seems as though he's busy doing something. After a few minutes I hear his voice again.

Exactly, I have calculated this.

What? I say out loud.

I found out how you can travel in time.

Really?

Yes. Do you want to meet me?

Yes.

Wouldn't that be too scary for you?

No, I would like to meet you very much.

OK, then come to the white corridor.

I leave my room, lock the door and walk towards the white corridor that is next to the door of the other clinic. I think this is the one Einstein means. The window in the door that separates our clinic from the other clinic catches my eye. The hallway of the other clinic looks just like ours. There's yellow linoleum on the floor and the doors of the patient rooms are white. It has a clinical appearance. The corridor is empty at first. Then I see an elderly man with snow white hair shuffling towards me in the distance. My heart starts pounding. When he arrives at the door, he taps on the window.

'Mr Einstein?' I try to open the door, but it won't open. The man remains standing. I walk to the nurses' office.

'There's someone in the corridor,' he wants to come in,' I say to Bob.

'Yes, that's someone from the other department. He does that quite often. Let him stay where he is.'

I leave the man where he is. Einstein's voice refuses to speak in my head. I do what Bob told me and walk back to my room. I take the key to my room out of my pocket and open the door. In my room I again start pacing up and down over the yellow linoleum.

Time... Time passes more slowly in space. What if time does not exist in outer space? What if there is no yesterday or the day after tomorrow? Is there also the 'beginning' of the universe somewhere. Is that the origin? Is that where the earth, the universe, originated? Is God there?

Shh, don't talk about the beginning, Wouter whispers to me. *Father doesn't like that.*

How can you *not* think about something? George Lakoff's book comes to mind.

'Don't think about an elephant, George Lakoff's book,' I call out loud in my room. 'That's exactly why people have to think about an elephant,' I continue.

Shut up! Bert and Wouter shout at the same time.

'How can I *not* think of the beginning, the origin?'

Shh. Soon we'll all disappear into the hole, Wouter screams.

I look at the plughole in the wash basin. That's where everything disappears. Everything washes away. *Will we disappear? Will the earth be destroyed?* The minutes pass.

It's all right. Father says that all is well, says Wouter's voice suddenly, as if he has just recovered from an exhausting battle. I feel a little reassured.

There's a knock on my door. 'May-May, can you open the door?'

I open the door to see a tall, slender blonde woman. She looks at me in a friendly way.

'My name's Annette. I am a trainee doctor. I would like to weigh you and do some exercises with you. Will you come to my room?'

I follow her through the white corridors.

Annette opens the white door of the treatment room. I'm a little dizzy. I see a black treatment table.

Black, the treatment table is black! Do I have to sit on it?

'May-May, could you stand on the scales?'

Thank goodness, I don't have to sit on the treatment table.

I take off my shoes and step onto the scales. The pointer indicates 65 kilos. I've lost a lot of weight, about fifteen kilos. I'm almost back to what I weighed before I started taking medication.

'OK, can you walk along an imaginary straight line?'

As best I can, I do what she asks.

'Great, thanks very much. OK, I'd also like to listen to your heart for a moment.'

She pulls out a black stethoscope.

Black! The stethoscope is black! That's the colour of the secret service! If she measures my heartbeat with it, the beating of my heart will spread throughout the building and the evil forces will also have access to my body.

'I... I.'

'What's the matter?' asks the doctor in training. She can see there's something wrong.

'Don't measure...'

‘What?’

‘Please don’t measure.’

The forces of evil are holding back. They are waiting for me to stop resisting. And that’s when they’ll take possession of me. Not just me, but the whole world.

‘Don’t you want me to do it?’

‘No. No. Please.’

‘OK then, we’ll do it tomorrow,’ she says.

The evil forces make their escape. I breathe a sigh of relief. I go back to my room, put on some music and after a few hours I go to sleep.

The next morning I’ve got an interview scheduled with the psychiatrist from the closed ward, Michel. He is waiting for me at the nurses’ office. He is wearing a neat jumper and a pair of jeans and is about my age. We walk to the interview room with Bob. Michel and Bob sit down at one side of the table, and I sit on the other side.

‘How are you doing?’ Michel asks.

‘I want to go home.’

‘We will do everything we can to make sure that you can go home as soon as possible... But you’re not doing well. I saw you dancing sexily in the living room yesterday morning.’

‘I love dancing,’ I say.

‘Yes, but how you were doing it. That was...’

‘I really like to dance,’ I add, furiously.

‘All right let’s stop talking about that then. I read some things in your file. Do you ever think about the secret service?’ Michel asks nonchalantly. It feels like they’re cutting into a deep wound without any anaesthesia. The head of the secret service reacts immediately.

You know you have to keep quiet about us!

'Eh, sometimes,' I answer hesitantly.

'I think it's a good idea for you to start taking your medication again.'

'I suffer from the side effects,' I murmur.

'Yes, I understand. What dosage would you like to take,' Michel asks.

'The dosage I'm taking now.'

'Good, then we'll try that first. If that doesn't work, we'll increase your medication.'

I hear his words, but they glide past me. As we walk out of the room, I hear Wouter's voice.

Eve, hang on! You'll get out of here!

After the conversation with Michel and Bob, I go to the living room. I sit down on a chair. In the corner of the living room I see my neighbour, the boy who seems to me to be looking for love. He's watching an item on the news on TV about the Islamic State and their horrific terrorist attacks. Bob passes by: 'Brian, do you want...?'

'No, mind your own business,' says Brian, and gives Bob a push.

'Brian, don't push,' says Bob making a defensive gesture.

Brian is really angry now and gives Bob a very hard shove. Bob loses his balance, but fortunately there's a sofa behind him and he lands on that. Bob gets up and walks away.

Brian finishes watching the news and then walks towards the nurses' office.

When I walk past the office on my way back to my room a little later, I see Brian standing in the office. The door is open. As I walk past, I overhear part of the conversation.

'I also want to become a terrorist. How do I do that?'

'Well Brian, that's not very nice. You're better off not doing that,' says Madelon.

'Yes, but how can I do that?' asks Brian.

I continue walking down the corridor. Once I'm in my room, I type an email to Jim. I indicate that I have lost my trust in the doctors and ask him if I can be transferred to his clinic in Maastricht, even though it's far away from here and I would have to miss Noah.

Hey Jim,

(...) Although we don't know each other very well, I have a lot of confidence in you as a professional and as a person. Especially regarding your vision that psychiatry is more than the treatment of a dysfunctional brain with medication. And because of your efforts in preventing stigmatisation, etc. (...)

Kind regards,

May-May

I send the email to Jim. As soon as I've done that, there's a knock on my door.

'Yes, come in,' I call out. The door opens and a moment later I'm looking straight into Martine's face.

'Your blue binder,' she says, as she hands me the binder.

'Oh, that's fantastic, Martine! At least now I can file my articles. How much do I owe you?'

'It was really cheap, forget it,' says Martine as she walks away.

I am really grateful to her.

Within an hour, Jim mails me back that Maastricht is too far and that it's important for me to go somewhere where I can also get good aftercare. I decide to leave it at that. It's time to eat again and I go to the living room.

On the whiteboard on the wall of the dining room, I see that I don't have to help out, but I start laying the table for the evening meal anyway. I fill the plastic water jugs, all the while holding my finger under the tap. Not only to feel if the water is cold, but especially because I'm then in contact with Christ and am able to purify the water. This way, my neighbour cannot attract the evil forces that can poison the water, and everyone is able to drink pure water. I place a plastic water jug on each of the four tables. I'm glad that Tinie will be sitting next to me, she's always busy with plants and flowers. As we start to eat, I notice that the instant I put food in my mouth I start hearing voices.

May-May, hold on, you'll get out of here, Wouter says to me via telepathy as I chew on my mashed potatoes.

I am with you, Christ adds. I don't hear Bert's voice. He doesn't like Christ very much. Working with the secret service suits him better.

'I'm with the PvdA,' I tell Tinie.

'Oh really? Do you ever see Wouter Bos?' she enquires.

'Sometimes, at a congress.'

'What's that?'

'The party organises congresses, where we discuss political issues. I specialise in foreign policy.'

Don't say too much, says Wouter.

I don't say a word for the rest of the meal.

After dinner, as often happens after dinner, we play volleyball. We meet up at the nurses' office. Bob opens the door for us and accompanies us. Lucia isn't there, I have no idea where she is. There are four of us from clinic A. For fun, I call our team *The A team*, with a nod to the TV series of the same name from the eighties. The A team consists of Brian, Tinie, Jack, myself, and a new patient called Bart. He's young, with curly mid-length hair, and wears a T-shirt with the text *Bury the Hatchet* on it. There's

also a drawing of a devil shaking Jesus' hand. Sparks fly everywhere.

Why is he wearing that T-shirt? Is he from another planet? Does he want to show that Jesus and the devil belong together? That evil is allowed, as long as it keeps quiet?

When we enter the hall, we're allowed to choose our own formation. There are also a number of people from another clinic, which enables us to play well. Brian is standing in the corner. Although he's very tall and with a slightly bent posture, he can serve the ball at a tremendous speed.

'Bend down,' Tinie says to me.

Startled, I step to one side.

'Brian, not so hard,' says Bob.

The next time it's Brian's turn, he serves the ball into the net. But there's so much force and aggression in it that the net falls down. When the net is hung up again and we've resumed playing, the ball almost touches the ground on our side. A player on our team just manages to touch the ball with his hand and before we realise it, the ball is on the other side of the net.

'Hey, what was *that*?' someone asks in amazement.

'That was the hand of God,' replies a fellow nurse.

You see, Christ is with us.

Towards the end of the game, we play the ball over the net to each other several times. Bart plays the ball to me a couple of times. He is remarkably skilful with the ball. Soon our volleyball hour is over.

Walking along the corridor back to my room, I see that Brian is strapped to a stretcher and is being driven away. I don't know why he is leaving and where he is being taken. An attractive woman, his mother I think, walks behind the stretcher with Brian. Her face is tearful.

The next day sees me pacing up and down the corridor. I'm locked up again. As I used to do during my earlier compulsory admission, I lean my head against the emergency exit made of glass. Behind it is the white gravel path and the beautiful big houses. Freedom beckons. Only this time the emergency exit is insulated. I can't feel the air flowing past my face so well, which makes it more difficult to have contact with Christ. In search of some fresh air, I walk to the courtyard garden. It's here, outside, that I feel Christ the best. That's why it's now the Garden of Eden for me. Through the fence I can see the Sint Vituskerk. Let us strive for love, peace and an end to hunger, I think. A tear glides silently down my cheek. I decide not to let my feelings show. After all, I am not only being watched by the secret service, I'm also a panther of the secret service. I march alongside the fences and sing aloud to the tune of Pink Floyd:

*'We don't need no medication,
We do not need fool control.
We don't need no medication,
We don't need no fool control.'*

Bob walks past and says with a smile: 'The ones who sing that song need medication the most.'

'Or solitary,' I answer, adding fuel to the fire.

Ten minutes later Bob calls out to me.

'May-May, the psychiatrist from the outpatients' clinic would like to see you.'

'He's not my psychiatrist anymore,' I murmur.

'He'd like to talk to you for a moment.'

'All right.'

Bob leaves and a little later my former psychiatrist from the outpatients' clinic walks into the patio. I've stopped marching now and am shuffling along the ground. I can feel him looking at me.

'How are you doing?' he asks.

We don't give her any information, the secret service says to me.

'I wish you all the best May-May,' she continues while standing at a distance.

'I'm here now,' I mumble, staring at the ground. I try to listen if the voices are telling me anything else. They're not. The psychiatrist remains standing for a while and then leaves.

I walk back to my room. On the wall near the bathroom I see a bright green grasshopper. That must be a gift from Christ! Excitedly, I place it on my hand – I don't normally like insects – and walk back to the courtyard garden where I let it out into the bushes.

The grasshopper is sure to be happy in the Garden of Eden!

It's almost dinner time and I'm scheduled to do chores, so I go to the kitchen to lay the table. As usual, I place the plates and cutlery on the table. I also fill the water jugs and hold my finger in the jet of water to purify it. When I've finished, and I look at my telephone, I see that I have a text message from Noah.

Hi Mummy I luv you,

Love Noah

I miss Noah so much! Noah, my child!

At half past five, the other patients walk in. Madelon takes the trolley with food from the room next to the kitchen and places the plastic trays containing food on the table. While we are all having dinner together, Jack is still in the garden shed. I wonder why the nurses don't encourage him to come and eat as well. Without saying a word, we eat our food.

After dinner I request a conversation with one of the nurses. 'I'm worried about Jack, he doesn't come to dinner often.' Bob reassures me. 'Make sure you take good care of yourself, May-May, we'll take care of the others. And your son's coming to visit you, I hear.'

A little later, Noah and Vince walk through the closed door into the ward. Bob has opened the door for them. Noah runs up to me, in the open kitchen. Vince and Bob are still standing by the closed door. Suddenly Lucia leaves the living room and walks quickly towards Noah and me.

Lucia, she is in contact with the evil forces!

She's coming closer and closer. Noah is now just a step in front of me.

What should I do?

As she stands right in front of us, Lucia quickly gives Noah a kiss on his hand. Then she leaves, through the door, to the corridor with the bedrooms. I'm relieved.

'Who was that, Mummy?' Noah asks.

'Oh, she's been admitted here too,' I answer in a 'matter of fact' tone.

'May-May, you can sit in the comfort room for a while,' says Bob. We follow him into the corridor. Bob opens the door for us.

The comfort room is a room that looks like a living room. There's a comfortable couch, a rug on the floor and the walls are painted yellow instead of the sterile white that characterises the rest of the ward.

'How is it going?' asks Vince.

Answer, says the voice of the secret service.

'It's going, it's going,' I murmur.

'Mummy will you be coming home soon?'

'I don't know when they'll let me come home again.'

'Noah's front tooth has fallen out,' says Vince. The voice of the secret service sounds in my head again.

'It's your task to bring peace, go to the corridor.'

I have to do my best not to do as the secret service says.

'That's a very special event, Noah,' I stammer.

I take my mobile phone out of my pocket and take a picture of Noah as a reminder of when his tooth just came out.

The... the photo's been taken, I have to leave now,' I stammer as I walk up the white corridor.

'Here I am, May-May Meijer, what's wrong?' I mumble down the corridor.

Say that you are ready to serve us.

'I, May-May Meijer, am ready to serve the secret service.'

All right, you can go back inside.

'Here I am again,' I answer, stepping inside.

'OK, we'll go then, because Noah has to go back to school tomorrow,' says Vince. The three of us walk out of the comfort room and into the corridor.

'Goodbye, Mummy,' says Noah while I give him a kiss. Then he walks through the heavy door with his father. He waves to me.

'Goodbye dear Noah,' I answer. I keep waving and keep looking at Noah and his father from behind the window in the closed heavy white door until they have disappeared from view.

THE COURT HEARING

Today I have a court hearing on my compulsory admission. I have the same lawyer as last time. At least he understands that I want to go home and when he defended me at my previous compulsory admission he had prepared thoroughly. After breakfast I go to the supermarket to buy drinking chocolate for my lawyer. It feels great to be free and out of the hospital for a while. As I stand in front of the shelf with different brands, I think about what brand I will buy.

Choose the brand you know, the secret service tells me.

I take the drinking chocolate of my trusted brand from the shelf.

Waiting in line at the cash desk a little later, I study the cashier. She's young, looks shy and has a lot of red spots in her face.

Tell her she's a hottie, the secret service commands me. It sounds to me like a strange assignment. I think about it for a moment. When it's almost my turn, I decide that it's important for me to say these words and that the worst thing that can happen is that I make a fool of myself. The client in front of me packs his groceries and walks away. The cashier scans my drinking chocolate.

'You're a hottie,' I say to her clearly audibly.

The cashier smiles. She doesn't say anything. I pay for the drinking chocolate, pick it up and walk away. I've done what I had to do.

I'm in my room again sitting at my table when there's a knock on the door.

'Hello May, can I come in for a moment?' Famke asks.

'OK,' I mumble.

Famke sits on my bed with the yellow-orange bedspread.

'I've called your work to say that you can't come for the time being.'

I say nothing. So Famke continues.

'Would it be OK if Pappa and I are present at your hearing about your admission?' My sister asks affectionately. I hear the voice of the secret service in my head.

You're our panther, you can do this on your own.

'No... no,' I answer.

Famke sighs.

'Really?'

'No,' I mumble curtly.

'OK, then I'll go,' says my sister and she walks out of my room.

A little later there's another knock on my door. 'May-May, your lawyer is here.' I walk out of my room, close the door and lock it. My lawyer is waiting by the nurses' office. He still has long hair, in a ponytail. Bob accompanies us to the comfort room.

'So May-May, how are you?' asks my lawyer.

'Good.' I mumble as I walk out of the comfort room and into the living room. I go to the fridge in the open kitchen and take out the drinking chocolate that I've just bought. I pour some into a mug and take it with me to the comfort room. I place it in front of my lawyer.

'Ah, drinking chocolate. Amazing that you remembered!'

Then Mrs Van der Meer, my very first doctor at the outpatients' clinic, arrives, accompanied by a registrar. When they enter, the judge takes the floor. She has bright red lips.

'Good day to you all. I would like to welcome you to the hearing on the compulsory admission of Mrs Meijer to the Rembrandthof mental hospital under the Special Admissions to Psychiatric Hospitals Act. Mrs Meijer can you say how you find it here?'

'I want to go home. I'm not ill.'

'But you attacked someone, as I understand?'

'That woman radiated negative energy. That's why I gave her a menacing look.'

'OK, so you want to go home. Suppose you could, what would you do?'

'Take my son to Russia for two or three weeks.'

'To see Edward Snowden, as I understand?'

'I don't know. I would at least need to get some rest first.'

'May-May's family have written me a letter,' says my former doctor. 'They're becoming exhausted.'

'That's very annoying for them,' I answer, but at the same time wondering why they didn't say anything to me about that letter.

'Can you indicate what kind of work you have?'

'I am committed to the secret service and am active for the PvdA. I'm also an adviser on microcredits and am working on current affairs concerning prostitution legislation.'

'And do you also take medication?'

'Not at the moment, but I'm thinking about it.'

‘Perhaps I can give some extra information,’ suggests my doctor, Mrs Van der Meer.

‘May-May has been under treatment for a schizoaffective disorder for six and a half years. She has also suffered many losses during these periods, both privately and at work. She has managed to keep the schizoaffective disorder under control through her enormous perseverance and willpower. She has also written a book. But at the moment we are less able to keep the schizoaffective symptoms in the background and we believe that psychotic decompensation has occurred. During the weekend of October 5 and 6, with the help of May-May’s sister and father, the Crisis Service did everything in their power to prevent another admission. That did not work.’

My lawyer asks my doctor: ‘Does it lead to dangerous situations?’

‘Yes, she is an acute danger to herself and to others. She is anxious, unpredictable and distrustful. She also jumped onto the table saying: “I am a panther and I have to defend myself against the world.”’

That’s not true! I wanted to defend the world – not myself – from the evil of that woman who was in contact with Hitler’s spirit.

My lawyer takes the floor again: ‘I also assisted Mrs Meijer during the previous treatment period and I observe a huge difference in the situation now. She does not try to avoid care and accepts help and medication. She wants to do this independently and not within the compulsory framework of detention. There is rather a contraindication here because Mrs Meijer experiences more tension in the clinic than at home, which does not help her recovery process. There has been no physical violence with regard to the aforementioned disagreement between Mrs Meijer and a fellow patient.’

The judge looks around. As far as she is concerned, everyone has been able to give their opinion and she comes to her final verdict: ‘OK, I’ve heard what has been said. And I understand from the medical statement and from the doctor that there is psychotic

decompensation resulting from a schizoaffective disorder. The resulting risk cannot be averted through the intervention of persons or institutions outside a psychiatric hospital, which is why I am granting authorisation to extend Mrs Meijer's detention for another three weeks.'

After the court ruling has been pronounced, everyone leaves the room. I thank my lawyer for making his plea to allow me to go home. In any case, he did what he could. He shakes my hand, clamps the file under his arm and walks out.

A MOTHER'S LOVE COMES CLOSEST TO DIVINE LOVE

I walk through the courtyard garden and look through the uncovered upper part of the fence to see the Sint Vituskerk.

‘Dear Christ, help me please,’ I murmur.

I love you, it will be alright. Just look around you.

‘Thank you dear Christ, thank you.’

I look straight ahead of me. Between the green ivy growing along the fence, I see a beautiful red rose. The flower is directly in the light of the autumn sun. A red rose! The symbol of love! And also the symbol of my political party. I take a picture of it. I observe that even in the innermost depths of a psychiatric hospital, where I have been admitted against my will, it’s possible to find something so beautiful. I am going to get out of here someday. I will be better and the world too. Peace is coming. I pick up my phone and post the photo of the rose on my Twitter account with the text: *I have been kissed by a rose... She is so beautiful.*

The door of the patio opens. Tinie steps out of the living room and walks towards me. She grabs me by the arm and takes me with her.

‘Look, I’ve made something. I want to show it to you.’

We walk through the living room to the open kitchen. On the table in front of the low wall that separates the living room from the kitchen, there's a viewing box wrapped in blue wrapping paper.

'Look,' says Tinie as she hands the box to me.

I take the box and look through the peephole in the middle. At the back, in the distance, I see a small drawing of a flower.

'A rose!'

'Yes, a rose. And I thought, I want you to have the box. Then you can give it to Wouter Bos, because I'm sure you'll see him again someday.'

'I don't know if I'll see him again,' I murmur.

'Go on, take it,' Tinie answers reassuringly.

It's nice of her, but I can't accept her present. Without another word, I leave Tinie in the living room and walk to my room.

I take the key out of my trouser pocket and open my door. I'm alone and feel intensely deserted by everyone and I don't feel at all well. It's as though time is standing still. I'm standing in the middle of my room.

'Christ, what am I supposed to do?'

Be open about your psychological vulnerability. And come to My home.

Be open about my psychological vulnerability...?

There can be world peace if Bert and Wouter know about my illness. I was going to bring world peace in 2009. Wouter was political leader of the PvdA at the time. He knows what's right with my story and what's wrong. He knows whether novice politicians are screened by the secret service... And of course there's also a chance that they will find out I have a schizoaffective disorder, but that world peace does not materialise... That does not make up for the importance of world peace. I will take that risk.

I decide to send Bert and Wouter the book titled *An Accident in My Head*, which I wrote under the pseudonym of Yasmin Vermeer, as soon as possible. I immediately call my sister to ask her to bring two books for me when they come to visit me this evening. Fortunately, she agrees. *What shall I do now?*

I walk to the living room to look at the schedule. It's on a sheet of white paper on the notice board. In ten minutes, creative therapy will be starting. Bob sees me standing in front of the schedule and walks over to me.

'May-May, you know Stijn van der Meulen, don't you?' Bob asks.

'Yes, he was my psychiatrist during my first admission here,' I mumble.

'He was killed in an accident with his friend on a fishing boat.'

'What?' I ask in amazement. I only half realise what Bob is saying, and that Stijn has died.

'If you want, you can sign the condolence book. It's upstairs in the quiet room.'

'I'll do that,' I murmur. I walk to the quiet room and write a message in the book:

Stijn, thank you for what you did for me and the other patients. I pray for him. Then I walk out of the room to the therapy room.

In the therapy room there are several plaster sculptures on shelves, it looks as though a lot of them have been made by patients. In the corner is a painter's easel with a colourful painting on it.

'What do you want to do?' asks the therapist. 'You can, for example, colour black-and-white drawings with coloured crayons.' She shows us a few examples.

Oh, that's wonderful, a drawing of a butterfly, that's what I want,' I murmur. The therapist walks to a room where the photocopier is located to make a few black-and-white prints of photos of

butterflies. We get to work conscientiously; we colour over the butterflies with coloured crayons. I choose to colour the wings of the butterflies blue. I use a white crayon to colour the spots on the wings. Suddenly Ramona speaks to me.

Make the surroundings gold, May-May. The colour of Mars.

I do what Ramona has asked me to do. I colour a leaf green, the colour of nature. This colour also refers to 'forest', which is the English translation of 'Bos', the family name of Wouter Bos. While we're working, Martine says to the therapist: 'I'm really sorry that that psychiatrist died.'

'Stijn van der Meulen? Yes, that really is a tragic accident,' answers the therapist.

'It's because of you,' hisses Martine at me as she walks past to grab some coloured crayons. The therapist doesn't hear it.

Yes, it must have been me. Stijn van der Meulen probably found out that the secret service was watching me, that I wasn't psychotic. And that's why he had to be eliminated. He knew too much.

'People, time's up. Put your drawing on this shelf,' says the therapist as she walks towards the shelf where we can put our drawings. Carefully, I place my drawing between the other drawings. The therapist helps me to free up some space. 'You can finish your drawing next time,' she says as she locks the door of the therapy room. She accompanies us to the closed ward via the glass staircase.

After dinner it's visiting time, as usual. I'm happy to see my sister's face.

'Hey May, how are you? I've brought two books for you,' says my sister, placing the books on the table in my room.

'Thanks,' I answer.

You've done well so far, May-May, Christ says to me.

‘Shall we go to Luno?’ I suggest.

‘Fine, if that makes you feel better.’

We walk out of my room at the back of the corridor through the white corridors. Suddenly I feel the negative forces pressing down on me again.

The iron braces in my bra are sending signals to the secret service. They radiate through the whole building! It drains me of all my energy. I need to take off my bra as soon as possible!

‘Oh, wait a minute. I need to adjust my bra,’ I say to my sister while I quickly dive into an open meeting room. I take off my jumper and cream-coloured lace bra as quickly as I can, and then put my jumper back on. I run back to my room and throw my bra onto my bed. Then I lock the door and run back to Famke.

‘Are you OK?’ my sister asks

‘Yes, yes,’ I murmur.

‘We’re popping down to Luno,’ my sister says to Bob.

‘Fine, have fun,’ he answers.

Then we walk along Groest Street past the shopping centre. I pass a shop selling country-style furniture. In the corner there’s a wooden clock with a picture of a woman next to the Eiffel Tower on the dial.

Paris, Bert loves Paris! This would be an excellent gift for him!

‘I want to buy that clock,’ I mumble to my sister.

‘Oh, well if you like it, there’s nothing to stop you,’ she answers.

I pick up the clock and pay for it. Then we go to Café Luno. I enjoy being outside the hospital again for a while, being free in the company of my dear sister. After two drinks I have to go back because visiting hours are already over. I clutch the Paris clock under my arm and place it safely in my room. I’ll give it to Bert as soon as I see him.

The next day I want to send the books to Bert and Wouter as soon as possible. At that moment, Bert is leader of the United Nations mission in Mali, MINUSMA. From within the closed clinic in the Rembrandthof, I look for a courier. I first Google on my laptop for a courier called 'peace' or 'the future', but they don't exist. Finally, I go for Daktiva couriers. My fingers glide over the keys of my phone. I feel negative and very intense energies pressing down on me. They don't want peace in the world and they're exhausting me terribly. I persevere until someone picks up the phone on the other side of the line.

'Hello, this is Daktiva couriers.'

'Hello, this is May-May Meijer. I would like to send a parcel.'

'Where do you want to send it to?'

'One parcel to Mali and one to the University Medical Centre of the *Vrije Universiteit*.'

'And where do you live?'

'Umm, I've been admitted to a clinic, the Rembrandthof in Hilversum.'

I hold my breath. Will they want to do business with me – a psychiatric patient?

'Fine, then we'll be there in a few minutes.'

'And could you to bring wrapping paper with you? They're presents.'

'Yes, that's fine. See you later.'

Talking on the phone takes a lot of energy out of me.

A few minutes later, the courier is allowed into the closed ward. He has pink wrapping paper with purple stripes on it.

That's good, he's thought of gift-wrapping paper.

'I get the feeling that this is a special shipment,' says the courier.

'Yes,' I mumble.

'I'm just going to my room to pack the presents,' I say as I walk to my room. In my room, I hastily cut the pink paper and wrap it round the book *An Accident in My Head*. It's extremely heavy, the negative forces don't want it. I manage to pack a book despite all that.

This one is for you Bert.

I'm exhausted and scared that one of the nurses will cause my mission to fail and that I won't be allowed to send the books after all. This has to work. I've just started cutting the paper for the book for Wouter when a young nurse arrives. I hear her footsteps in the corridor and she approaches my room. She's standing in the doorway. With her big dark blue eyes she looks directly at me. I hold my breath. Will she ask me what I'm doing? Will she block the shipment?

'Are you managing?' she asks kindly, to my relief.

'Yes, yes,' I answer, reassured.

As soon as I have wrapped the present for Wouter, I walk down the white corridor to the courier and hand him the two parcels.

'One of the parcels has to go to Africa, I see?'

'Yes, yes,' I answer hastily.

'No problem, we'll take care of it,' he answers.

Then he walks away with the two parcels. I breathe a sigh of relief. Despite the fact that negative energies are working against me, and I'm locked up in a clinic, I've done it!

My story is being sent to Bert and Wouter, there will be world peace!

I walk to the patio to see how my rose is doing. Its leaves are still there, but it seems to have almost finished flowering. I take a pair of scissors from the kitchen and carefully cut it away from the ivy. Then I walk to my room, where I put the rose on my windowsill.

A few days later, Noah and Vince come to visit me again. Even though my heart skips a beat when I hear their voices in the hallway and see them walking into the living room, I remain unmoved.

‘Shall we go to your room?’ suggests Vince. The three of us walk down the corridor.

When we arrive in my room, Noah pulls out two packages.

‘Look, Mummy. We’ve brought presents for you,’ says Noah.

‘Oh, what a beautiful plant Noah. How sweet,’ I say as I place the cellophane of the plant with the pink roses on my desk.

‘And this booklet.’

I take the little book from him. On the front is a drawing of a mother and child.

For mothers, it says on it.

‘I’ll read that in a minute,’ I say, stroking Noah over his head. I don’t have the energy to hold him tight and give him a big hug.

I look at the red curtains in my room.

Red. I am Mary Magdalene. It is important that I get photographed on the bed!

‘Vince, would you take a picture of me?’

‘A picture? Yes, of course’ says Vince and he takes a photo of me.

I sit down on the chair at my table and study the photo. I’m satisfied with the result. In the meantime, Noah and Vince are lying on my bed together, making jokes. It’s such a wonderful sight. I quickly take some pictures of them.

Once Noah and Vince are gone, I sit on the chair at my table. I browse through the book Noah has given me. A poem comparing motherly love with divine love in heaven touches me deeply. I love Noah unconditionally.

*The love of a mother!
What can be compared with it!
Of all things on earth, this love comes
closest to divine love in heaven.
Motherly love means a life full of devotion –
and sometimes the sacrifice of a life – where
just one thought, one hope and one feeling exists;
that her children grow up to be healthy and strong,
free from bad habits and able to
take care of themselves.*

Anonymous

I cross out 'bad habits' and add: 'that they will take good care of their fellow humans'.

Before going to bed, I'm standing in front of the mirror above the washbasin when I hear a knock on the door. Bob speaks to me in a friendly and concerned way: 'It would be good if you took your medicine. Then you'll be able to go home earlier.'

'OK,' I answer this time. I'm surprised by my answer too. Bob pours water into the small metal cup. Then he hands me the plastic bag containing the medication. I open the plastic bag and place the medicines on my hand first. Not just the Lorazepam but the Orap too, the antipsychotic. Then I pop the pills into my mouth. I swallow them with a sip of water from the metal cup.

'Well done, May-May,' says Bob. Then he knocks at the door next to mine.

What a pity, now I have to look for a new Aphrodite, says Christ. I'll let you live.

I don't care anymore. I've almost died so many times already. And I want to get out of the Rembrandthof, I want to be a mother to Noah again. But the medication doesn't work straight away. Now that Christ has gone, the secret service has to help me get out of the

Rembrandthof. I feel cold. The evil forces are testing me now more than ever, they are pushing down on me and exhausting me.

What if I form a protective circle around my bed? Maybe I'll be able to sleep then.

Next to my bed, I place a painting with a poppy on it – the first present I bought for Bert – the plant Noah gave me, the book *For mothers*, and a chair. I pull two long-sleeved T-shirts over each other and then a jumper. But I'm still cold. It's as though the energy has been disturbed simply due to the things I've placed around the bed. Without Christ there is no harmony. I remain in bed waiting for the evil forces to disappear, and I finally fall asleep for a short while.

Fortunately, Christ returns the following day as I wake up in the morning. *I love you*, he says. I clean up the loose dark hairs lying on the ground, because I know he doesn't like that. A few minutes later, I open up my laptop and email Wouter Bos' secretary to ask if the package has arrived.

Yes, it's on his desk waiting for him, she emails me back fairly quickly.

I smile faintly. The chances are high that Wouter will get the parcel!

I walk to the living room to have breakfast. The living room is empty but someone left the TV on. It's tuned to a French TV station. Bert Koenders is on TV and, as head of the UN peacekeeping force, is talking about MINUSMA's mission in Mali. Dressed in a suit, he is walking in the burning hot sun among the dark-skinned soldiers.

Bert! In Mali! How good of him! He really wants peace. This way we can still have contact with each other through the TV.

A new dark-skinned patient enters the living room and shuffles across the floor. I walk up to him and give him a hand.

'Welcome, I'm May-May,' I say.

Wonderful, Bert will like that, says Wouter's voice in my head.

The man says nothing.

'I want peace,' I say.

The man looks at me angrily.

'*War, I want war,*' he says.

'*Peace,*' I answer.

'*War,*' he shouts loudly now. He looks at me, enraged.

'*War!!!*' he repeats, walking towards me in a threatening manner.

'*OK, let's sort this out,*' I answer. I walk to the kitchen, open the kitchen drawer and take out two spoons. A sword fight with spoons follows. After a short skirmish, I win.

'*OK, it will be peace,*' says the man.

'May-May, what are you doing? Is Elias bothering you?' asks Madelon, who has just arrived.

'No, no, it's OK,' I answer quickly. Elias sits down at a table. Then we all have breakfast together.

After breakfast, I leave the clinic, accompanied by Bob, to get some groceries from the supermarket on the corner. We agree to be back at the cash desk in ten minutes. I always enjoy a few moments off, it's an outing for me. At the entrance to the supermarket there is a stall with UNICEF products.

UNICEF is an organisation that is committed to the welfare of children and is part of the United Nations. This is a sign from Bert.

I pick up a UNICEF diary. On the front there's a smiling dark-skinned child wearing a yellow dress and a blue UNICEF backpack. Inside the diary are also lots of stunning full-page photos of happy children. I decide to buy the UNICEF diary. I also buy a box with red Christmas baubles and a ruler and two pencils of UNICEF.

Then I go through the gates, into the supermarket. Just past the gates I see crates of fruit. I buy two apples. Then I walk through the different gangways and soon I've arrived at the shelf with the soups. A red carton with tomato soup catches my eye. It contains sachets of soup that you can dissolve in water.

Red, the colour of safety, that's Bert's colour.

I take the tomato soup from the shelf. Next to the tomato soup is a green box with herb stock cubes.

Green is the colour of nature, of the forest, of Wouter Bos.

I take the carton of soup from the shelf and put it into the blue shopping basket.

Satisfied with my purchases, I walk to the cash desk. I can see that Bob is waiting for me there. Together we walk back to the Rembrandthof. Although Bob is very nice, I don't tell him anything about my UNICEF diary, that's strictly confidential. On the way back I see a lorry with the inscription 'Bos' on it.

Bos. This is a sign that Wouter has received my package.

Back in my room, I place the groceries on my desk. I take a photograph of the blue UNICEF diary with the red Christmas baubles and the UNICEF pencils. Then I put the two apples on the wooden border in the open kitchen and take a picture.

One day we, Adam and Eve, will be re-united.

As soon as I have taken the picture, I clean one of the apples and take a bite out of it.

Great Eve, I can talk so well with you, Wouter says to me via telepathy while I chew on the apple.

That's remarkable, I can hear your voice very clearly now, I answer via telepathy.

I love you, dear Eve, Wouter whispers to me.

I also love you dear Cupid, I whisper back via telepathy. After a few more bites, the apple is finished.

Wow, this was so fantastic, this apple is part of the history of the world, I think to myself. I take a glass from the bathroom and carefully put the apple core in the glass. I place it on the windowsill next to the red rose.

A few days later, I'm in my room when my mobile phone rings. I see a number I'm not familiar with. I pick up the phone, curious to know who's calling me.

Hello, this is Aartjan Beekman. I'm a friend of Wouter Bos and he's a bit worried about you. I'm a psychiatrist. How are you?

Oh, yes. It's nice to know that Wouter is worried about me. I have been compulsorily admitted to the Rembrandthof mental hospital.

'Oh, that's annoying to hear.'

'I'd like to get a second opinion.'

'Oh, OK. And do you know how you're going to do that?'

'Yes, I want to ask Jim van Os. Do you know him?'

'Yes, I've spoken to him before.'

'I don't know if he wants to do it or if he can, a while back he was abroad.'

'In any case, I wish you all the best!'

'Thank you!'

I was right, a friend of Wouter's has called me, he's worried about me.

I don't know if world peace has come any closer now, but at least it's a step in the right direction.

IN SEARCH OF PEACE AND CHRIST

After a few weeks, I'm given the freedom to go outside. I decide to follow my heart and to go to Christ's house just as He asked me to. It's already rather dark outside. I walk in the direction of the Sint Vituskerk, with its high illuminated church tower. The church door is closed. I see the rectory next to it. The brown building seems to be built in the same type of stone as the Sint Vituskerk and therefore fits nicely with it. I walk over the gravel to the rectory, it crunches under my feet. I ring the doorbell in anticipation. It remains quiet for a while. At some point, through the stained-glass window, I see a silhouette coming to the door. The door opens. A man with a friendly face and white, almost angelic, mid-length hair stands before me. He's wearing a black shirt with a black priest's collar.

'I was actually having dinner, but I was curious to know who was at the door,' says the pastor.

'Hello, I'm May-May. I've been admitted to the Rembrandthof.'

'Oh. Behind this building?' asks the pastor, gesturing in the direction of the Rembrandthof.

'Yes.'

'I'm Father Dresmé.'

'I feel such a love for Christ and would like to give Him something,' I say softly.

'Then it's best to join the church,' the pastor answers kindly.

'Great. How do I do that? I still have some questions about faith,' I answer.

'Come back in a few days' time,' the pastor advises.

In preparation for the conversation with the pastor, I mail him some questions about faith. During my period of freedom I also go to the Fair Trade shop in Bussum by public transport. The shop is located on a square. I enter the shop and walk past a shelf with all kinds of candles. A green candle from Java catches my eye. Green is the colour of nature, of the forest. So this candle does not only belong to Christ but also to Wouter Bos.

Do you like this candle? I ask Wouter Bos telepathically.

Yes, it's beautiful. Father will love it.

I pick up the green candle and hold it lovingly. I look around the shop. There is a shelf with different kinds of colourful Tony Chocolonely chocolate bars. There is also a carousel with postcards from faraway places. On a glass table I see all kinds of wooden heart-shaped trays.

Yes, I think they are beautiful, says Christ to me via telepathy. A black streak runs through the wood. I carefully select a beautiful wooden box where the black does not dominate. When I have found a tray I like, I walk to the cash desk with the green candle from Java and the heart-shaped tray.

'Would you wrap them for me?' I ask the saleswoman

'Yes, of course,' says the salesgirl with grey curly hair, smiling. She cautiously tears the gift paper off the roll and wraps the presents.

I've got some beautiful presents for you, Christ, I say via telepathy to Christ as I leave the shop and return to the Rembrandthof.

A few days later, I carefully put on the clothes that I had laid out the night before. My red blouse, the one I wore when I spoke to Bert at a political meeting about the war with Iraq. My new black trousers. And finally, my watch bracelet with a peace sign and a heart on it, and the necklace with the blue tanzanite stone. I leave the hospital and walk towards the towering church. I ring the doorbell at the rectory. An employee, an older woman, opens the door and lets me in. The pastor is waiting for me in his office, the door is open. I look inside in admiration. The pastor is sitting at his desk, wearing a dark shirt and his priest's collar. His room is full of statues of angels. We take our seats at a large wooden table. I put down my notebook with a picture of two blue tits on the cover in front of me.

'Welcome,' he says.

'Thank you. I would like to give Christ a gift. He told me that He would like to have this wooden heart-shaped bowl and this green candle from Java.'

'How do you know that? Do you have contact with Him?'

'Yes... telepathically.'

'Can you explain to me what the wooden bowl stands for?'

'Yes, the shape of the heart forms the core, it stands for love. It's made of wood, which symbolises nature. The dark wood shows that 'evil' is allowed to be present. As long as it doesn't do any harm.

'But we have to fight evil,' answers the pastor.

'Evil is a part of it all. At least, if it keeps quiet,' he continues.

'Are you familiar with Madonna and her *secret revolution of love*?

'Yes, I'm familiar with Madonna. She brings a lot of faith into her work.'

She says, *'We are all on this ship together.'*

The pastor takes a closer look at the wooden heart-shaped box. 'I see a flame shape. The symbol of the holy spirit.'

I nod.

Yes, the pastor understands, Christ says to me via telepathy.

The pastor continues: 'Where did you buy it?'

'At the Fair Trade shop.'

'Ah, that's good,' says the pastor. He places the green candle and the wooden bowl next to him on the wooden table.

'OK, and you sent me some questions,' he continues.

'Yes, that's right.'

'Among other things, you asked about the abuse that has taken place in the church and the most important thing in the Bible.'

I nod in agreement.

'To start with the first matter. Sexual abuse is a disgrace. It is the opposite of protection and love. Pedosexuality is a disease. It is more likely to manifest itself in closed systems. Now the church is 'open', so it's not likely to happen again.'

I am relieved that the pastor wants to talk about this thorny subject and makes it clear that abuse is a disgrace to the church.

'You also wanted to know what the most important thing in the Bible is. Well, I could talk about this for a long time. God is, in reality, several people. Three people and yet one. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the word of God that shows people the way to Him and to each other. He brings people together in faith, in a covenant. The church is just a building. We human beings form the community, we are, as it were, the living stones of the church.'

‘Oh yes, you also asked me how I view other religions. I think the most important thing is that they serve peace and happiness.’ I smile. *Yes, I recognise that from my psychoses. All religions strive for peace.*

I listen attentively to the pastor’s stories. He has a huge amount of knowledge about faith and is able to convey this in clear language. Time flies by and soon it’s time for me to go back. The pastor gives me a hand and I walk out of the rectory.

As I walk across the crunching gravel outside the rectory, the idea comes to me to pass by the Chapel of the Virgin Mary that is part of the Sint Vituskerk. The yellow and white pennant hanging outside indicates that the chapel is open, the pastor told me. On the threshold of the chapel lies a dead ladybird.

‘Ah poor thing,’ I sigh as I lay the ladybird in the bushes to the side. Suddenly I feel contact with heaven.

Putin and I both work for the secret service, but we are each other’s opposites. I worry about a small innocent life, while Putin has many deaths on his conscience.

After contemplating on this, I step across the threshold into the chapel. I feel at home with Mary. The chapel has a simple beauty, with beautiful statues, including of Mary holding baby Jesus in her arms. ‘I love you Mary,’ I say.

This chapel is for you too, Christ says to me.

I say a short prayer for peace on earth and an end to hunger and sickness. Then I leave the chapel and walk back to the Rembrandthof along an avenue in which the white congress centre Gooiland is located.

With some reluctance, I go up the steps of the stone staircase and enter the yellow round building again. I continue my way past the reception with the two large palm trees, through the white clinical corridors. As I enter the living room, Jack comes up to me. He falls

down on his knees mumbling in front of me. It feels as if he is worshipping me.

Jack knows what's going to happen, I think, while a nurse helps him up. It all becomes too much for me and I flee through the door of the living room to the courtyard garden.

Christ leads me around while I walk round in the patio. Jack smokes a cigarette in the garden shed.

Look, everything is alive, you see, Christ says to me.

As I walk past a few shrubs, the leaves of the branches stick to me, as if they want to touch me. The hydrangea possesses a stunning beauty. The little insects on the ground are also talking to each other.

Suddenly I hear a crackling noise under my feet... The sound chills me to the bone. I've stood on a snail!

Mammaaaa, mammaaaa! A little snail cries.

Sobbing, and upset by what I've done, I flee back into the living room, which is now empty. I flop down onto the brown pale leather couch and start crying, invisible to everyone. After a few seconds I go to my room.

I sit down on my chair behind my table and take out my light green book with the drawing of two blue tits on the front that my niece sent me. I write down my experiences in detail and describe my love for Christ. With a wink I add that I am a bit jealous of all those people I have to share Him with. I also write down that I love Bert and Wouter very much, and that my motherly love, my love for Noah is the greatest love of all. I also write about the love I feel for Famke as my sister. It seems as if I am overwhelmed by love for God, for my son, my sister and for people I don't really know very well. Suddenly another thought goes through my mind.

The secret service will want to kill Vince when I marry Bert.

I start crying when I think about this. 'No, no, no,' I cry at the thought of it. 'Don't do it,' I say weakly. I cry for a moment, until that thought disappears again.

I continue writing and stroke my hair with my fingers. I feel a lump on the back of my head.

They've opened up my head and put a chip in it, because I threw away the transmitter that my mother's husband had hidden in my keychain, while we were eating at the pizzeria.

I entrust this to my diary, but don't tell anyone else.

When I'm sitting next to Tinie and Jack for breakfast the next morning, I feel the lump – the chip – in my head with my finger.

The secret service is controlling my thoughts.

I try to think of something else. I spread some butter on a slice of brown bread and reach for the box of pure chocolate sprinkles. Tinie hands me the sprinkles.

The secret service is registering what I eat, everything!

Jack takes a sip of his milk.

That chip is driving me crazy!

I have to throw up. I rush to the sink in the kitchen. I gag and a wave of warm vomit shoots from my mouth into the sink. I feel a new load of vomit coming up from my stomach, and again I vomit. I look at the mess in the sink. There are dark brown flakes in it and an acidic smell arises from it. I am ashamed of myself, but I let it happen in resignation. There is nothing else I can do.

Madelon shouts, 'Yuk, May-May!'

Sorry. I couldn't get to my room in time,' I murmur.

'You'll have to clean it up yourself.'

I shuffle away, even though her words are reverberating in my ears. I feel too sick to clean it up and I'm only half aware of what's

happening. Bob arrives with a cleaning trolley. He puts on his plastic gloves routinely. I'm grateful to Bob for cleaning up the filthy mess. But I can't speak and I walk away.

There was nothing you could do about it, May-May, says Christ to me as I walk along the white corridor to my room.

At some point, the lump disappears and I stop thinking about the chip. A few days later I enter the Sint Vituskerk for the first time. With its 98 metres, it towers above its surroundings. With a longing in my heart, I walk towards the building. As I get closer, I notice the large wooden doors in the middle of the church. In the middle of the doors there is a large stone statue of a saint. Above the doors there is a stone plateau with the image of Jesus and some of His apostles. I take the side door on the left side of the church. As soon as I cross the threshold, I enter a small hall. I hear the voice of Christ in my head: *Welcome to My home. Good to see you here.*

'Thank you, dear Christ,' I answer out loud, softly.

To my left, behind a black fence, I see a statue with three bronze figures on a pedestal. The middle one is of Mary with wings holding a child in her arms. To the side there is a woman and a man.

A trinity. Just as Bert, Wouter and I form a trinity!

Cautiously, I take a few photos. However, I feel that Christ would rather I didn't so I study the pictures and remove the ones in focus to protect Christ.

I open the door to the large church hall. The church hall is huge and consists of magnificent vaults, wonderful statues of holy figures and marvellous scenes.

Welcome, May-May, says Christ again.

I'm very pleased with his loving greeting but I would like very much for an earthly person to tell me more. An older man is

lighting the candles in the church. As if sent by Christ, he comes up to me.

‘Hello, my name is Hans. Shall I tell you more about this church?’

‘Yes, please.’

‘That statue you see there is the Holy Saint Vitus. He is the saint allied to this church.’

In admiration, I look at the stunning statue of a young man with a lion at his feet.

The parish of Sint Vitus has merged with the Willibrord church from another location. As we talk, we walk to the rear part of the church.

‘Are there any women who play an important role in the church?’

‘Yes, this is the statue of Saint Barbara,’ says Henk, pointing at the wonderful statue of a holy lady. While I take a picture of the statue, Henk walks on.

‘Look, I think you might know this statue. That’s the *pietà*, the statue of the dying Jesus on Mary’s lap.’

Tears start to come to my eyes – what an intense and deep pain that must be to have to lose your child – and I nod in agreement. We walk past the rear and upper part of the church.

‘That is the sacred altar. You are not allowed to walk on it,’ says Henk in passing.

Finally, he takes me to a separate part of the church.

‘This is the Chapel of the Virgin Mary. Unlike the Protestants, we pray to Mary here as well.’

While Henk is talking, I hear the voice of Christ in my head: *Look, this one is for you, Aphrodite. Everything is going to be alright; we have love for everyone. There will be no more battle between good and evil.*

In my thoughts, I add: *We all belong on this ship together. That Noah may become a healthy, big and, above all, sweet young man.*

Henk accompanies me outside. I thank him for the tour and, suitably impressed, I step over the stone steps back into the sunlight.

I continue walking to a park, the Laapersveld. From the street I can see the green trees surrounding a large ornamental pond. I walk around the pond. In the middle of the pond lies a tiny island. When I get to the end of my round, I see a group of about fifty geese standing on the road. One goose stands close by me and spreads its wings. It's as if he's carrying a message, the world is about to wake up. Or is it the spiritual awakening in me?

GOING HOME

One morning, as I'm walking along the white corridors of the ward to my room, Elias approaches me with a drawing in his hand.

'I've made a drawing for your son.'

I look at the drawing. It is a colouring picture with two swans that Elias has coloured in.

It says: *For Noah, love you.*

'How kind of you Elias,' I say as I accept the drawing. Elias smiles and slaps his leg with his hand in laughter: 'Ha. Ha. I've just sent the devil's boss packing,' he says, laughing. 'There will be peace on earth.'

'That's fantastic,' I answer.

Is that because I won our sword fight? I wonder.

'You will not grow any older than you are now. Until the day Jesus Christ returns to earth.'

'That's great.'

'Your son will continue to look 25 years old, even as he gets older.'

I smile.

'There will be peace for millions of years,' Elias calls out as he walks away excitedly.

Peace for millionnnnnzzz of years, that's a wonderful thought, I think, as I walk to my room.

I unlock the door to my room, walk inside, file away the drawing for Noah in the blue binder I got from Martine, and take a seat behind the wooden table. I pick up the green booklet with the two birds on it and write: *This is how it will go. We love Jesus Christ and look forward to His return to earth. He is my husband and I am His wife, Aphrodite. Or is it May-May Meijer from Berkel en Rodenrijs?*

I am sure I will recognise Christ when I see Him and I am very curious to know what He looks like. Time goes much faster for Him than for us.

I have the feeling that I am walking along the border, as if it were a balance beam. Sometimes I lean to one side and then to the other. As if 'genius' and 'insanity' are fluid concepts which mean something different depending on the person. I pick up my phone and tweet: *The boundary between genius and insanity is very thin.*

A nurse knocks on my door.

'May-May, it's almost time for your session with the independent psychiatrist. Can you come to the comfort room?'

'Yes, fine. I'm coming,' I mumble.

I walk into the ochre-yellow coloured room. It's empty. The cosy atmosphere of the room does me good. Will the psychiatrist allow me to leave?

I support you, dear Aphrodite, Christ says to me.

A few minutes later, a woman with shoulder-length dark brown hair enters the room.

'Hello, I'm Mirjam van de Velde,' she says. I understand from your doctor that you would like to go home?'

'Yes, I would.'

'I also understand from the doctor that he wants you to stay here?'

'Being in the psychiatric hospital is only making things worse.'

'Why do you think that is?'

'I feel imprisoned, which makes me lose my appetite. I weighed 75 kilos on medication and now I weigh 57 kilos.'

'I'd rather you stayed here as well.'

'I have the right to leave. I'm not a danger to myself or to others.'

'Yes, that's true,' the psychiatrist sighs. She looks down at the ground.

'That's right,' she repeats. 'All right, let's leave it at that, then, shall we?'

'Fine,' I answer, and leave the room. I'm pleased that I'm able to work on my peace mission, but at the same time I feel exhausted. As if I'm empty inside.

The next morning, I'm present at the day opening ceremony. We're sitting in a circle in the living room. Tinie is rubbing her legs with her hands. Jack is staring dreamily in front of him, as usual.

'Good morning,' says Bob. Today is the 8th of November.'

The 8th of November! It's Vince's birthday today. Vince, the great love of my life. I will leave here and start my mission for peace.

Bob continues: 'Shall we do our round? Tinie, do you want to start?'

'Yes, I didn't sleep very well last night. I woke up at three o'clock and went to the nurse's office to ask for a Lorazepam.'

'And did you manage to get some sleep after that?'

'Yes, I fell asleep then.'

'Good, and what are you going to do today?'

'Follow the programme. And I'd like to go to the market to buy some flowers.'

'That sounds fine to me. You can go and buy the flowers if there's time for it. And May-May, now it's your turn.'

'I didn't get much sleep last night. I'm going home today.'

'Yes, that's right. Is someone picking you up?'

'Yes, my mother's picking me up.'

'Fine. If you come to the office, we'll arrange the last things before you leave.'

'Fine.'

Bob continues the circle until everyone's had their turn.

When we're finished, I go to my room to pack my things. When I have packed everything, I go to the nurses' office. The glass door is open. Bob is sitting behind his desk.

'Bob, I'd like to hand in my key.'

'Yes, that's fine. I'll give you the rest of your medication and the things from your locker too,' says Bob as he disappears into the room at the back of the office.

Ask him if you can take a picture of him, Aphrodite. Bob is an honest and hardworking man, Christ says to me.

Bob comes out of the room with my passport and the medication I had handed in earlier.

'Here you are,' he says to me. 'Good luck, May-May.'

Thank you, Bob. And, uh, Bob, I'd like to ask you something.'

'Yes?'

‘Can I take your picture?’

‘My picture? Oh yes, of course you can.’

Bob poses in the hallway and I take his picture.

‘Goodbye, May-May,’ he says.

His words glide past me. I’m listening to the voice of Christ.

Fine that Bob wanted you to take his photo, Aphrodite, he says to me.

I walk off with my dark blue trolley case and my yellow bag with the image of the Eiffel Tower and *Paris* inscribed on it.

I wait at the main entrance of the Rembrandthof until my mother arrives to pick me up. I put the suitcase and the bag against one of the big stones outside the Rembrandthof. The sun is shining.

Bert, I’ve got the bag from Paris with me. I’m coming.

Today is the 8th of November, Vince’s birthday. A day of love, a good day to start my mission. A little later, my mother’s beige car arrives. I get into the car.

We drive to the Rabobank in Bussum because I want to store my valuables in a safe. In the reception room there is a beautiful painting with white butterflies and blue-green taxis in New York.

Those white butterflies must be a sign from Christ. He wants me to do this.

A desk clerk gives us the forms for the safe. I fill them out in a hurry. Once I’ve done that, she shows us the way to the safe, which is located underneath the building. The huge steel entrance door is impressive. It is already open and enormously thick. I see a whole row of small boxes, the lockers.

I carefully place my diaries in the safe as well as the book *An Accident in My Head*. This information can save the world because it describes my encounter with Christ and how the secret service

works. As I turn the small key of the safe in the lock, I breathe a sigh of relief. This task is completed.

Then we go to the shoe- and key maker. My mother and I enter his shop quietly. The doorbell rings loudly as we open the door. The shoemaker is wearing a blue apron.

‘Hello Sjoerd.’

‘Hello, young lady.’

‘Sjoerd, I’d like to have two extra copies of this key made.’

‘Fine. Two copies, we can organise that for you,’ says Sjoerd, as he selects two similar copies and turns on the key cutting machine. It makes a high-pitched sound. Sjoerd is such a craftsman, an honest craftsman. A while ago I came to him with a pair of shoes and he said that I was better off buying new ones because they couldn’t be repaired. Although it didn’t give him any business, he gave me honest advice.

Yes, Sjoerd is a fine man, says Christ telepathically to me.

‘Here you are, two keys,’ says Sjoerd.

‘Thank you. And, uhm, do you mind if I take your picture?’

‘A picture? Of me? OK, if that’s what you want, fine,’ he continues.

I grab my phone and take a picture of him. It’s important that he is immortalised. I study the photo on my phone. Sjoerd is standing in front of the camera and looking a bit to the side. His hands are working with the keys.

‘Great,’ I mumble.

‘Fine,’ says Sjoerd cheerily. ‘See you again soon.’

‘Goodbye,’ my mother and I say in unison as we leave the shop. The doorbell rings.

Then we have some cake in a café filled with colourful paintings of men and women eating cakes. My mother is talking to me, but her

words just glide past me. As soon as we have eaten our cakes, we drive to my house.

We arrive in my street and once again I'm standing in front of my white house with the green front door. As I step over the threshold of my house, I try to get in contact with Bert.

I want to work for peace, I tell him telepathically.

My mother walks through to the kitchen. She puts a piece of cheese in the fridge and fresh bread in the bread bin. She makes me a cup of tea.

'So, tonight you'll be sleeping in your own house again at last,' she says.

'Yes,' I answer somewhat resignedly. I'm relieved that I've regained my freedom, but something deep inside is gnawing at me too. I don't feel very well after all.

BACK TO THE REMBRANDTHOF VIA SCHIPHOL AIRPORT

When my mother has gone, I am all alone in the house. *I am alone*, the thought flows through my body. Until I notice a cup of tea on the sink. *Who set that?* I wonder.

I did that for you, Bert says via telepathy.

We will stay with you, together we will achieve world peace, Wouter adds.

‘That sounds good, but aren’t you married Wouter?’ I say. I want your wife to decide if it’s OK for the three of us to bring about world peace.’

Then I no longer hear Wouter’s voice. It’s just me alone with Bert’s voice. It remains quiet for a while. Then suddenly I experience a feeling of heaviness. As if someone is in danger of being murdered.

‘What was that?’ I ask out loud, scared.

I hear Wouter’s voice: *It’s the secret service, they told my wife Bernadette they would kill her if she didn’t choose for world peace.*

That is true, I think to myself. The secret service always thinks that you either have to choose *for world peace or you have to die*. By

giving Bernadette the choice, and without realising it, I have handed her over to the secret service. Suddenly I hear a new voice. A woman's voice. *Hello May-May, it's Bernadette. Wouter has told me about you. Of course I agree with world peace. I feel sorry for you. You have had to endure so much.*

How sweet of you. I love you too, I tell Bernadette via telepathy.

That night I don't sleep a wink. I make love to the people I love; to Bert, to my secret high school love, and to a former colleague. I get up several times to drink some water and go to the toilet. In the corner of the room there is a beige chair. When Bert and I make love for the first time in real life, Christ will be sitting on that chair.

As I'm getting dressed in the morning, I hear the voice of Elyn Saks, an American professor who also has schizophrenia and who wrote the book *The Center Cannot Hold*.

I am with you May-May, I support you.

'Thank you Elyn, you give me hope,' I say out loud. I go downstairs and start walking round the white coffee table.

Wouter and I are here for you, Bert says to me via telepathy. This reminds me of a theatre director who had a relationship with two women. And the women also had a relationship with each other. I pick up my phone to see if he has a Facebook profile. And indeed he does. I quickly send him a friend request. Once I've done that, Wouter demands my attention again.

Come on, let's go to Mali to pick up Bert, he suggests by telepathy. That sounds like a good idea. I realise that on my way to Schiphol Airport I will go past the house of my mother and her husband. So I go up to the attic and take the black-and-beige tea towel with the sheep on it. That is *the* proof that Frans tried to poison me. I get into my car, that's parked outside my front door.

'Schiphol, Schiphol, where is that again?' I ask myself out loud as I get behind the wheel.

We'll show you the way, says Bert's voice in my head.

'OK, thanks Bert,' I say out loud.

Throughout the journey, I talk with the voices I hear in my head. At one point I leave the motorway and get lost for a while. I drive towards a canal. I turn my car around there and head back towards the motorway.

May-May, I need to know if you are willing to die for the good. Drive onto the motorway, against the traffic, says the voice of Christ in my head.

I am already driving in the direction of the No Entry sign when he says: *OK. You don't have to do it. I just wanted to know if you would do it.*

In the distance I see an oncoming car. I manage to turn around just in time.

After a while, I arrive in Oegstgeest. I approach the villa belonging to my mother and Frans. I get out of my car. It feels as though I am about to embark on a very important mission. I take the tea towel in my hand, proof that Frans wanted to kill me. My body feels heavy and my feet feel like lead. I walk up to the front door. I stop right in front of it.

'Frans, I will forgive you if you confess your sins,' I say out loud.

Christ supports me from heaven. I feel a ray descending on me from heaven. I ring the doorbell of the house and wait for the door to open. I stand there for some time. There is nobody home. So I leave the house and get back in my car.

As my father once taught me, I hold the steering wheel firmly with two hands, but in the meantime I talk out loud in the car: 'Bert, Wouter and I are going to Schiphol Airport. Peace is coming, peace on earth. The people will see it. Masses of people will be on the streets. Crowds of people will greet peace on earth with joy.'

May-May, we from Mars also want peace, Ramona suddenly says.

Don't talk to Mars, May-May, Bert doesn't like that, Wouter confides in me.

But I can't help it.

'Thank you for your support, Ramona. World peace on earth is long overdue.'

May-May, what are you doing now? Bert has gone now, Wouter warns me.

'I know Wouter, Bert has gone. But it's also important for us to keep in touch with Ramona. Peace on earth. We radiate love to everyone. We want peace on earth.'

When I arrive at Schiphol Airport, I park my car near a parking spot marked by a sign with a windmill on it. I go to the departure hall. People are rushing past me. Speaking out loud, I stand in a corner: 'World peace is coming, do you know that? February the 14th, Valentine's Day, the day of love will then be the day of world peace. In five hundred years' time, in 2513, there will be world peace.'

Nobody seems to notice me. I keep repeating it out loud: 'Those who believe me will be guests of honour on the day of world peace.'

The passers-by are still rushing around, looking for their flight or hurrying to pick up their loved ones. After standing there for a while, it's time to get on a flight. I don't have a ticket and decide that I have to fly to Mali via Paris. I look at the departure boards for the next flight leaving for Paris. I go to the reception desk. As I stand in the queue, a military police officer comes up to me. He is wearing a dark blue uniform and gives me a stern look. He has short hair, recently cut, and is closely shaven.

'May I see your ticket?'

'I want to go to Paris,' I mumble.

'Come with me,' he says.

I follow him, and a little later I'm at the military police's office.

'What do you want to do in Paris?'

'I'm going to Mali. Wouter Bos is coming to get me any minute.'

'Wouter Bos isn't here.'

'He'll be here soon.'

'How did you get here?'

'By car.'

'What kind of car do you have and what colour is it?'

It's a Volkswagen Polo, light blue,' I answer curtly.

'And where is the car parked?'

'In the car park with the windmill,' I murmur.

'Can I have your keys and your driving licence?'

I comply with his request and give my driving licence and keys to the officer. He is a man of authority. If I show him that I am a panther, he will probably realise that I'm from the secret service and that I'm looking for Bert and Wouter to work together for world peace.

Grrrrrrrrrrr,' I growl.

The officer's eyes open wide.

'GRRRRR,' I growl again, this time louder.

'Come with me,' says the officer, leading me into a room. Obediently I do what he says: 'Stay here and wait.'

Then he picks up his phone and disappears to another room, dialling as he goes.

After a while, a woman enters the room. She has long hair and a resolute look about her.

'Hello, what's your name?' she asks, coming closer to me.

'My name is May-May. Are you a psychiatrist?'

'Yes, I'm a psychiatrist. Do you speak Dutch?'

Yes. I've just come from the Rembrandthof.'

'Where is that?'

'In Hilversum. Do you know Elyn? She's a Professor of Psychiatry. She suffers from schizophrenia too.'

'OK, thank you May-May,' says the psychiatrist as she walks out of the room. From behind the glass door, I see her talking to the man from the military police.

After their conversation, he enters the room again. He releases the handcuffs from his belt and puts them on me dexterously. I submit to it. I feel the cuffs close tightly around my wrists, but I walk meekly with the military police officer along the long corridors of Schiphol Airport. I have stopped talking out loud inside myself.

For world peace, goes repeatedly through my mind.

We arrive in a white corridor that reminds me a bit of the hospital. The man takes the handcuffs off me. A female officer joins us. I have to take off my bracelet with the peace sign, and put it in a plastic bag together with my car key and my other keys. They accompany me to an isolation cell. The man opens the white door for me and I walk inside. The heavy door falls shut. I see a white stone bench and white walls. Once again I have the feeling that I have landed in the innermost depths of the earth where no one can reach me. After a few moments I hear the voice of Christ.

Even here, if no one else is here for you, I will be here for you, he says.

I'm here too, Mummy, I hear. *Ah, my son, how sweet.*

Time passes and I have no idea how long I will stay in solitary confinement. The different voices race continuously through my head.

May-May, I got on a plane and I've arrived in the Netherlands, says Bert's voice.

Good, let's meet at Castle de Haar in Haarzuilens, that's where Vince and I got married, I answer.

'Fine,' Wouter adds.

Stand up straight, dear child, says Christ.

I hold my stomach and buttocks slightly in, push my shoulders slightly backwards. My head upright. I am a child of God and Christ wants me to stand upright and proud. A little later, the cell door opens again.

'Would you like something to drink?' asks the military police officer.

Is this an invitation?

'Yes,' I murmur.

He gives me a cup of water.

'Where do you want to go?'

Shall I say I want to be taken to Castle de Haar? That Bert and Wouter are waiting for me there? Would that be the right answer or will I be taken to a psychiatric hospital again?

'Where we agreed,' I answer cryptically.

The man says nothing and walks out of the cell. Once again I remain standing proudly upright in the solitary confinement cell for a long period.

Finally, the cell door opens again. The male and female military police officers are together. I am allowed to leave the solitary confinement cell. The female military police officer gives me the plastic bag with my jewellery. I accept it. I study the logo of the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary and the text on the plastic bag: Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary.

I am a partner of the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary.

The female and male military police officers accompany me to a yellow ambulance.

I'm being taken to a psychiatric hospital again, unless this is a disguise.

A man in ambulance uniform straps me to a stretcher. I clutch the plastic bag of the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary in my hand.

After driving for a while, we arrive at a red brick building. It is already dark. A nurse comes up to me.

'Welcome to the Spaarnepoort Clinic,' she says as I get out of the ambulance.

As I follow the nurse to my room, I think: *I gave the wrong answers.* The leaflet on my desk catches my eye. The Spaarnepoort building belongs to GGZ inGeest – the Dutch Association for Mental Health – and I know that this falls under the University Medical Centre of the *Vrije Universiteit*. *Good, at least then Wouter can look in my file and see how the secret service misbehaved.*

It's time for bed. I fall asleep, exhausted.

The next day after breakfast a nurse comes to see me.

'You will be transferred back to the Rembrandthof today,' he says in a gentle voice.

The secret service has taken care of that, so that Wouter can't look in my file.

In the Rembrandthof, a hearing is taking place concerning the continuation of my court order. However, I am so sick that I cannot attend the hearing. My lawyer represents my interests and indicates that I want to go home. The judge decides to grant a provisional court order for a period of six months.

SPIRITS IN MY BODY

It is important that a record is made of my stay at the Rembrandthof. This is where the road to world peace begins. I'm wearing my favourite gold-coloured jumper with a pair of dark jeans. I ask Corine of the nursing staff if she can take a picture of me.

'Yes, I'll do that for you,' she says cheerily.

I'm glad she wants to do that. As I pose, I stand proudly upright again, that's important to Christ. After all, I am a child of His. I post the photo on Facebook and take a shower.

As I am showering, I look at the gold-coloured crystals in the puddle of water at my feet.

Gold, that's the colour of Mars.

Very soon afterwards, I hear Ramona's voice.

You know that we're short of water on Mars, don't you?

Yes, I do.

Do you realise how much we are suffering? She asks.

I spend a moment reflecting on what it must be like to have no water at all and to die of thirst. I turn off the shower tap, I don't want to waste any more water. I look at the toilet bowl, which is wet from the shower water. Small puddles or large drops have formed on the toilet seat.

No water, Ramona repeats.

With my tongue, I feel on a drop of water on the toilet seat. I lick and swallow it. Once I've swallowed the drop, I start on another drop, and then another, and another, and another. I don't stop until the toilet bowl is almost dry.

Thank you for your empathy May-May, she says softly when I'm finished licking.

Nobody except myself is aware of what I have done.

When I have finished showering, I get dressed. I pick up my phone and see on Facebook that a friend – he was a director of *Theseus the Bull Dancer*, the play I appeared in – has accepted my request for friendship and remarked that someone with their feet so firmly on the ground is bound to make a quick recovery. I feel hugely heartened by his comments.

The next day I stand in front of the mirror above the washbasin in my room. I'm wearing my gold-coloured jumper for the occasion and a dark brown jacket. Sewn into the inside of the jacket is a white label showing a red heart with a sword through it, and a set of angel wings. For me that symbolises the trinity that Bert, Wouter and I form. The three of us together form love. The sword symbolises that Bert does not shy away from violence when required. The angel wings show that Christ supports us. I take a picture of it. When I study the photo, I see a streak of white light on the photo.

Christ is supporting me. I am being carried by the white light, just like in the song White Light by Marco Borsato. I heard that song directly after my first meeting with Christ. I asked for proof then, I get it now.

I place my phone on the table and walk across the room. I have the feeling that Wouter is with me and that we will come together with Christ. I am a child of God, as Valerie told me in my previous admission. Wouter Bos is also a child of God, he has been talking to Father all his life. I call him Christ and only met him for the first time during my previous compulsory admission.

Children, I am very happy to see you, says Christ.

That is fine, Father, replies Wouter.

It will be alright, children. There will be peace on earth. I would like you to proudly walk as upright as when I created you.

I start standing upright in my room.

I am Eve, Aphrodite...

Something is not right, child. I love you, says Christ and then remains silent. I hear a familiar voice. It is Ramona.

I know why. May-May is Mary.

Mary, Christ says to me.

Yes, you are Mary. I've missed you so much.

I'm glad I'm Christ's loved one too. I am Eve, Aphrodite and Mary. In that order. Christ has left for a moment because he is so happy. When he returns, he says: *Mary, I love you.*

I'm glad that Christ is happy and that light has also entered his darkness.

I leave my room and walk to the living room, all the while talking to Christ and Wouter. The living room is empty, but the television is on. Prince William, the son of Princess Diana, and his wife are on the television with their new-born son. I sit down on the couch to watch the item. Suddenly I feel someone demanding my attention. It is Princess Diana. She says to me via telepathy: *Please, please tell them that I love them so much. Send them my kisses from heaven.*

I start crying at the pain Diana feels for missing her sons.

Tears run down my cheeks as I walk back to my room. I pick up my phone and log on to Twitter. I tweet to Prince William: *Your mother sends you kisses from heaven.*

I push my phone into the back pocket of my jeans and pace back and forth in my room. I'm imprisoned. I can't go outside. Poor people who are in prisons and locked up too! So I take my phone out of my back pocket and tweet to Prisoner Care: *Do all prisoners in the Netherlands have clothes to wear? Do they make sure they eat well? Are there good rehabilitation programmes?* I also sympathise with the intense pain of those who have been rejected and renounced by everyone, such as paedophiles (of course I don't condone child abuse).

There's a knock on my door.

'May-May, are you coming to Creative?' Bob asks when I open the door.

'I'll be there soon,' I mumble.

A little later I walk along the light-filled corridors with the big silver letters on the vaulted wall, via the glass staircase to the second floor of the main building. We have Creative in one of the two light-coloured rooms connected to each other by a large open door. There's a different group in each room. We work at large wooden tables set against each other. Whereas during my first admission in 2009 I really had no idea what to do with creative therapy, now – a few years later – I've started to love the attention, love and peace we get when we, the patients, work on our crafts. I pick out a beautiful light pink shell from a large tray full of shells. I clean it under the tap. While I'm doing that, I feel as though I hear the voice of my first psychiatrist, Grace. I saw her go into the room of the patient from Italy. *Is she doing OK? Or has Lucia bewitched her?* I take a deep breath. *Help, help*, I can hear her cry. I try to send Grace my love through my thoughts. *You are going to be OK, Grace, you are going to be OK*, I repeat gently in my head. For a moment it is quiet. Then I

hear another voice in my head. *Thank you, May-May, I feel better.* I breathe a sigh of relief. I take a sheet of white paper and write Noah a few questions so that we can make up a story together about the shell. Such as where it comes from, where it had been lying and if the shell has a name. After that I go back to my room.

On the way to my room I see a new neighbour standing in the hallway. He's wearing a brown leather jacket.

'Hello, I'm Danny.'

'Hello,' I mumble.

'They've sent me here because they said I threatened a woman with a knife, but that's not true,' he adds.

'Oh,' I mutter. His words glide past me. I turn the key in the lock and enter my room.

In the evening, my father comes to visit. I'm grateful to him for bringing the Toto CD I asked for, as well as a little teddy bear I got from Niels. When I am psychotic, I have love in my heart for so many people. The Toto CD has the song *Africa* on it. The song reminds me of Bert.

'How are you?'

I don't answer but study the picture on the front of the CD. A blue sky with white clouds, a ring with a big sword going through it. A sword! Bert wants nothing more than peace, but sometimes he uses violence to achieve it.

'Dad, there's a saying in the Bible about violence, isn't there?' I murmur.

'Yes,' replies my father. 'They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.'

'I have to go to my room,' I say. Abruptly I get up and walk away.

'Please Christ, please protect Bert,' I exclaim. 'He may use violence sometimes, but I love him. I love him!'

I know you love him, says Christ. I listen to hear if He wants to say anything else, but Christ doesn't answer anymore. In despair I stay in my room.

In front of the mirror, I call out twice to the secret service, who have installed a camera behind the mirror: 'I, May-May Meijer, ask for Bert Koenders to be protected. Code red.'

Then I walk back to the living room to have tea with my father.

'May-May, I'll go now. I can see you're very tired,' my father says quite soon. He gives me a kiss on my cheeks and leaves.

Before I go to bed, Madelon comes to my door to ask if I want to take my medication, but just like every other day, I refuse. She leaves. It's dark outside. I close my red curtains and walk into the small bathroom. I brush my teeth. Then all of a sudden, I can't prevent myself from breaking wind and it frightens me. The devil loves the smell of hydrogen sulphide.

He's sure to be attracted by the smell!

I feel the evil forces approaching. They want to enter my room. I walk out of the bathroom and remain standing upright in my room. I suppress any more wind. I think thoughts of love, just like when I was in solitary confinement. I remain standing for hours. The digital clock on my bedside table jumps a minute. I can just about make out the numbers. It's now 02.10. I keep standing still as much as I can, continually radiating love.

This is the revolution of love. We all belong on this ship together. This is the revolution of love.

The minutes and the hours go by. It's difficult to concentrate when you can't see clearly. Very carefully I pick up my glasses from the desk with one hand and put them on. The clock now says 04.10. The negative energy increases sharply, and then decreases sharply and back again, and so on. I'm scared and exhausted, but I stay up all night.

Eventually I see the first rays of sunshine radiating through my curtains. *The light! The light! The evil forces are gone and I'm still here! There will be world peace!*

Next door to me I hear a door slam. It's my neighbour Danny's door. He walks onto the corridor. He's walking swiftly. As if he wants to be the first to get somewhere. *I must have had a fight with him last night. He also stood upright in his room all night! He is the devil's helper.* I will prove that I am not afraid of him! I open the door of my room. Nothing happens. Then I walk to the living room. Danny is sitting on his own at a breakfast table. I deliberately sit opposite him. Elias and Jack join me. The table had been set the previous evening. Out of nowhere the knives and forks next to Danny's plates and mine start to vibrate.

'What's that?' asks Elias, who is sitting opposite me.

'The cutlery's moving,' answers Jack.

Danny looks straight ahead of him. He doesn't want to be seen to be weak. The vibrating of the cutlery is due to his and my mental forces constantly colliding with each other. I also keep my lips tightly closed. We continue eating our breakfast in silence.

I have cleaning duty with Jack. We clean up the breakfast things. The Movement class has been cancelled so I sit down at a table with a colouring picture of Christmas bells. I colour it in with my heart and soul. Suddenly, I feel the spirit of Ramona from Mars in my body.

You! It was you who murdered the devil! And he was our energy supplier!

'I didn't know that,' I mumble.

I order you to bring him back to life, she says furiously as she races around in my stomach. It feels something like taking a sip of water that's a little too cold. But that's a liquid, and cold, and you know it goes down through your oesophagus. Ramona is an energy and races through my whole body at lightning speed.

Mummy, I will protect you, says the voice of Noah.

I am here for you too, Mary, Christ adds.

But Ramona is furious.

I'm going to get our friends from Saturn, just you wait and see, you're going to experience something special!

I've suffered so much already that I wait resignedly for what's coming to me. As well as I can, I work on the drawing. Meanwhile I walk frequently to the tap in the kitchen to drink some water.

Mummy, let's colour this clock green for Wouter Bos. Obediently I do what my son tells me.

I'll have you killed, Ramona screams, still furious.

I wait, but I don't feel the power of Saturn.

Don't think that you're rid of us yet, Ramona continues, enraged.

Ramona's energy races around my body at lightning speed. By now I also feel three other energies, but I have no idea who they are. Suddenly I hear a familiar voice.

Can I help? Although I have only ever heard his voice through the phone, I recognise the voice of Jim van Os, Professor of Psychiatry, the person I asked advice from.

Yes, I am in your body now. Boy, what a Gordian knot this is.

Together with the spirits and energies, I walk to my room to drink some water. When I feel the cool water gliding through my oesophagus, I lose Jim's energy, but to my despair the other energies are still there. I want to get rid of them.

I walk out of my room onto the patio. I take my shoes and socks off so that I'm standing barefoot on the floor. The ground feels cold. I try to focus my attention on the Sint Vituskerk and to absorb the love of Christ.

'Dear Christ, please help me,' I say, pleading out loud.

The energies disperse. I quickly put my shoes and socks back on and go back inside. As I walk through the corridor to my room, I suddenly feel something small bubbling up in my stomach again.

Ha, ha, I was hiding. You thought you'd caught me didn't you! But I'm still here, Ramona says tauntingly. I immediately take off my shoes and socks and walk barefoot down the corridor. The forces are very strong, that's why I can't go into the living room anymore. I start talking inside myself and continue to walk barefoot in the corridor so that I am in contact with the earth as much as possible. *This is the revolution of love. We all belong on this ship together. This is the revolution of love,* I repeat to myself. Radiating love is the path to victory.

Mummy, I will stay with you, my son says.

The negative forces run away in the face of my son's loving voice and I go into the living room. I start walking around in circles. Bob comes up to me.

'May-May, what are you doing in your bare feet? It's far too cold, isn't it? Let me get you a pair of shoes,' he says and walks away. I murmur softly: 'No, no,' but he's already gone. A little later he comes back with a pair of men's jogging shoes in his hand.

'Here, look, they're a bit too big for you, I think, but put them on.'

No, no, I don't want to. Then I'll have less contact with the earth.

But Bob is so helpful and skilled that a few moments later I'm wearing the shoes that are too big for me. When he's gone I start singing out loud the song I often used to sing in music lessons at secondary school:

*'Oh, when the Saints.
Oh, when the Saints,
Oh, when the Saints go marching in.
Let's all get together and join them.
Oh, when the Saints go marching in.'*

Stop this. You know I can't stand this. Stop it, screams Ramona.

I do my very best to keep singing and repeating it until I feel her powers fading. At some point, I don't feel Ramona anymore and she's gone. I carry on walking around in circles in the living room.

After walking around for a while, it's time for dinner. Jack isn't there. It doesn't matter. I place the plates and cutlery on the table and fill the plastic jugs with cold water. I put my finger in the water to feel if it is cold and to purify it. Tinie is already sitting at the table, staring ahead of her, I go and sit in the seat next to her. Bob fetches the trolley with food from the room next to the kitchen. There are large plastic containers on the cart.

'So folks, we're eating nasi tonight,' Bob says, removing the top layer of plastic from the containers and setting them down on the table.

I eat the food without saying a word. It tastes good. When we've finished eating, we get dessert. As usual, it's a beaker of yoghurt with an aluminium lid on top. Bob holds the box of yoghurts in front of him and offers them to everybody in turn. He also holds it in front of me. I choose the one with an apple and cinnamon sticks on the front.

An apple. I am Eve. Wouter is Adam. He is coming soon!

'Wouter Bos is coming soon,' I suddenly say out loud.

'Oh,' says Bob. 'I think he's with his wife and children.'

'He'll be here soon,' I insist.

'Yes, I'd like to see him too,' says Tinie. Bob and Danny get up to clear the table. I walk around the kitchen sink in circles. Tinie takes a bunch of pink tulips out of the fridge and puts them in a vase. At some point she comes up to me. 'This is for you,' she says, holding a ring-shaped potato crisp with a tulip leaf inside it.

'Thank you,' I mumble as I approach the chip ring with the petal. It's a guardian angel,' she adds. I go to my room, where I put the guardian angel on my desk.

After that, I go to the entrance of the closed ward, close to the nurses' office and stand there. The heavy and negative forces are furious at me. But I persevere.

The secret service is making sure that I am detained in the Rembrandthof. They are also working against Wouter. He has to come all the way from Amsterdam. Ronald Plasterk has to be there, because as the Minister of the Interior, the secret service falls under him. Ronald does not believe in God. That is why ghosts have no control over him. It is important for the secret service to know whether people believe in God or not. That is why people in the secret service watch to see whether ministers and parliamentarians take the oath or the vow. I will wait until Wouter arrives, he will come and get me out of here, and then we will leave to work for world peace with Bert.

'What are you doing here?' asks Bob.

Don't say anything, says the voice of the secret service.

'May-May, Wouter Bos isn't here.'

I don't answer. Bob goes to the office.

Christ supports me.

I'll help you, Mary, he says to me, as I rub my right ear.

'What are you doing, May-May?' asks Madelon, who happens to be walking past.

'Oh, uhm, I'm talking to Christ.'

'Oh, it's as though you've got an earphone in,' she says. Then she walks away again.

I stay standing like this, fighting against the negative forces.

I will remain standing here. I will wait until Wouter Bos and Ronald Plasterk come to set me free.

The minutes, the hours go by.

When Ronald comes he will stop the negative forces at the door of the hospital. Wouter will walk into the living room and set me free.

Several hours pass by and I am still standing by the door of the nurses' office. The evening nurses go home and the night shift nurse, Pieter, arrives. He has short hair and friendly big blue eyes.

'What are you doing here?' he asks with a smile.

'I'm waiting for Wouter Bos.'

'Wouter Bos isn't coming,' he says.

I don't respond. So he leaves me standing there and visits all the patients to bring them their medication. When he has seen all the patients, he walks to the office and stands next to me. He looks at me.

'May-May, Wouter Bos really isn't coming.'

Stoically, I remain standing. Suddenly, Pieter says, straight from the heart: 'I can see that you are suffering.'

Yes, I am suffering. I am suffering enormously.

I stop staring at the door and look at Pieter for a moment. He sees me looking at him and wants to use this small opening in my sea of mist to help me: 'I think it would be good for you to start taking your medication again. Shall I get it?'

I immediately sink back into my other world.

He wants to give me the medication even though I'm not sick and I'm suffering from the side effects.

I look to the door again and re-focus on my mission.

'I am waiting for Wouter Bos,' I murmur.

Pieter lets me stand there for a while, but at eleven o'clock he sends me to my room. I trudge along the long white corridor and reluctantly turn the key into the lock of my room.

Once I'm inside, I am overwhelmed by the negative forces. They weigh heavily down on me. I can hardly breathe. I get up and start walking around in circles in my room. But the negative forces are so powerful that I leave my room, looking for better energy. I wander around the living room, without sleeping, until the next morning.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR AT THE REMBRANDTHOF

‘Could I have my phone back, I want to call Jim?’ I ask Madelon at the nurses’ office. Madelon is sitting behind the desk, staring at the screen, with her thick blonde hair in a ponytail. She looks up.

‘OK, May-May. But if you can’t get him on the line, that’s the end of it,’ says Madelon.

She walks to the room at the back of the office to get my phone out of the safe. I feel the tension rising up in me. I have a lot of faith in Jim, even though I’ve never seen him. If there’s anyone who can help me get better, it’s him. If he says I need medication, I will take it. But what if he doesn’t answer the phone?

‘Here you are, but remember: you can only try once,’ she says as she hands me the phone. I take the phone.

Feeling as though I’ve just won some treasure in a battle, I go to my room clutching it. I decide to email Jim via my phone:

Dear Jim,

Would you like to give a second opinion or would you prefer to keep your work relationship separate from your patient relationship?

I would very much like to hear from you. My lawyer and I are of the opinion that I was in a healthier state when I entered the Rembrandthof than I am now.

Kind regards,

May-May Meijer

What if he doesn't see my email? I pace back and forth in my room. There's a knock on my door: 'May-May, it's time to hand in your phone,' says Madelon.

'Wait just a minute. I want to see if I've got a reply from Jim,' I say as I take my phone and look in the inbox. I see that there is an unopened email in my inbox.

'Yes, I've got a reply from Jim! He wants to drop by for mediation and he also wants to talk to my psychiatrist.'

'That's nice for you, May-May, and now I'd like the phone back,' says Madelon. I hand her the phone.

I'm too ill to cheer or be happy. But I feel a glimmer of hope again. I'm sure Jim can help me, he's a small ray of hope in the outside world, that seems so far away now. He will come and visit me in this hermetically sealed fortress.

The next morning I have a session with my psychiatrist Michel at the clinic. As usual, we sit in the consultation room. I take a seat at the wooden table in the white room.

'How are you doing?'

'Not good.'

'I had that idea too, why won't you take your medication?'

'I don't want to,' I mumble.

My psychiatrist utters a barely audible sigh.

'May-May, you should take your medication if things are not going well. And yet, you don't. Can you explain that?'

'The medication makes me sick.'

'Yes, but that's what we agreed.'

'I don't want to.'

'You're unreliable,' my psychiatrist says, out of the blue. He opens his eyes wide for a moment, as if shocked by his own honesty. I appreciate his honesty enormously. Although I tell him hardly anything about the secret service, I now suddenly feel a kind of affection for him.

'I can hardly eat.'

'Yes, you've lost a lot of weight. If this goes on, things will turn out badly. That's why we're going to give you forced medication.'

'I don't want to.'

'There's no alternative, May-May. I gave you a chance. Spare the rod, spoil the child.'

A short silence falls. Michel breaks the silence and continues: 'In a few weeks we'll have a talk with Jim.'

'Yes, I'm looking forward to it,' I answer sincerely.

'Do you mind if the conversation takes place in front of a mirror wall, so that more people can follow the conversation? We think it will be very educational for others.'

For a moment I listen to the voice of Christ, then I answer: 'Yes, that's fine.'

That's the end of our conversation. I get up and return to the group.

Because I don't want forced medication, a hearing takes place in the Rembrandthof concerning its enforcement. I feel uncomfortable with so many people in one room who have come especially for me. There are so many faces... Eight? Ten? I have difficulty concentrating.

'I think Mrs Meijer is in a deep psychosis...' I hear someone say.

May-May, come to me, whispers Christ, while I feel my ear.

I get up, open the door and walk to the corridor. The people at the hearing continue their discussion.

I love you and I am with you, Christ says to me.

I also stand by you, Wouter adds.

I walk back and forth along the corridor. The door of the meeting room is open.

'It's best if we give forced medication...' I hear someone say.

Bob gets up and walks towards me.

'May-May, it has been decided that you should be given forced medication. I'll walk with you to the ward.'

There's no other alternative, goes through my mind.

Together with Bob I walk to my ward via the glass staircase. Bob opens the door for me with his master key and lets me in.

When I arrive at the ward, Madelon greets me with a big smile and a bunch of flowers. It's a beautiful bouquet of cornflower-blue flowers and pink roses.

'Look, this bunch of flowers is for you. They've just been delivered.'

'Thank you,' I mumble.

I read the card attached to the exuberant wildflower bouquet.

Get well soon, Mina and Fatima.

I go to my room and place the flowers on the desk. Then I walk outside to the patio. I murmur softly: 'Christ, Mina and Fatima have sent me flowers. They understand that I am sick.'

That evening I'm in the office to take my medication. 'The Netherlands is a constitutional state, you don't have to give me the medication via an injection,' I murmur. Madelon watches me place my medication on my hand and swallow it with a sip of

water from the small metal cup. From that moment on I take my medication dutifully every night in the nurses' office before going to bed.

Time flies and I spend the days participating in the daily programme and taking walks in the Oude Haven Park and the Laapersveld Park. Every time I get the opportunity to leave the clinic, I do it.

On a Wednesday afternoon, walking is on the programme again. I put on my new blue sneakers with an orange stripe. I hear the voices of Wouter and Bert in my head.

'We'll walk with you. You'll get out of here, May-May,' they say simultaneously.

Luckily, I can't hear Noah's voice anymore, he's just a child. It is too much of a responsibility for him to help me save the earth and he knows I can manage without him now. I lock my room and walk to the office where the Movement therapist Reinold is waiting for us. He's wearing black tracksuit bottoms and a white T-shirt. Danny and Jack are already there, waiting. Danny is wearing his brown leather jacket, Jack a tracksuit.

On our way to the forest, we pass leafy avenues lined with beautiful houses, and I take photos of them. Characteristic houses and white houses, the architect Dudok once lived in one of them. Soon we're in the forest. I love the crisp sound of leaves under my feet. Suddenly Jack gently pushes me off the pathway. It seems as if we are alone in the forest for a moment. He asks me: 'What's your favourite James Bond film?'

'The one with Pierce Brosnan.'

'Is he your favourite actor?'

'Yes,' I smile.

Jack is trying to find out what my favourite James Bond film is because they will be making a James Bond movie of my story. Everything I do is

top secret. They're even trying to take my favourite actor into account, which is nice.

When we are out of the woods, we pass a shopping street. I ask if someone would like to take a picture of me next to a statue of Mickey Mouse on the street. When we are almost back at the Rembrandthof, we pass a fashionable neighbourhood with hedges cut into unusual shapes and human-sized statues in the garden. One statue is of a male figure.

Adam!

I quickly take a picture.

'Okay, May-May, let's keep going, you've got plenty of photos now,' says Reinold, who is usually so patient.

A little later we're back at the Rembrandthof. Reinold walks in front of us to open the locked door.

As soon as I am on the ward, I continue to take photographs. I want to record everything – from my special encounter with Christ in the Rembrandthof to all the new impressions I get. I take a picture of two bright green Granny Smith apples on my bed (they symbolise the time when Adam and I were still in paradise), of my bag with the angel wings and of a small vase of flowers that my mother gave me.

When I have finished taking photographs, I sit at my desk in my bedroom.

Surely it can't be true that I'm constantly being bugged by the secret service?! Hey, this is the same feeling I had the last time I came out of my psychosis.

I go to the living room to see if Lisette is sitting there again, the nurse I told that I was out of my psychosis the previous time. She's not there. I walk back to the corridor. In the laundry room I see another nurse whose name is also Lisette. She is bending down to take her laundry out of the washing machine and put it in a basket.

'I think I'm doing better.'

'That's great, May-May,' she answers, looking up.

'Yes, it's just like the last time. I can't imagine that the secret service is watching me all the time now.'

'Wonderful, it's great for you that things are going better,' she says.

Although my feelings are suppressed by the medication, I walk back to my room in a slightly cheerful mood. I have already started a new diary and am writing down my experiences. My handwriting has become very small and spidery as a result of the medication.

During visiting hours, Vince and Noah come to see me again. Vince has brought a green miniature Christmas tree with red balls with him.

'This way, you'll have a bit of Christmas in your room in the hospital,' jokes Vince.

'Where do you want it?' he asks.

'What's a good place, Noah?' I ask.

'Here, next to your desk, Mummy.'

'All right, I'll put it there,' says Vince.

Vince puts the tree down. Then he picks up Noah and holds him upside down over his back. Noah calls out: 'Daddy, Daddy! Stop, stop, stop! Put me down!' I watch them with a smile on my face. I'm glad the visit is so informal. Suddenly, Vince pulls out a beautiful light blue box and gives it to Noah. In his turn, he gives it to me.

'Look Mummy, this is probably for you because you believe in God,' says Noah as he hands me the light blue box with a print of two angels on it and the inscription *Sacred Peace*. When I pull the light blue cardboard to one side, a black velvet box appears with the same imprint of the two angels and the words *Sacred Peace*. On the black velvet bedding lies a shiny black stone cross about five centimetres in length with a purple bead necklace.

‘Oh, it’s beautiful,’ I say, giving Noah a big kiss. Vince blinks in encouragement. He’s happy that I like the gift so much. I put on the necklace and ask Vince to take a picture. Noah wraps his arms around me and together we pose for the photo. After a while, Noah says: ‘Sylvia bought the necklace from a friend, for you.’

For me it’s special that Noah has given it to me as a present. It’s great that the necklace has come via Sylvia, precisely because we got to know each other during extremely difficult circumstances. It is important to forgive. *Could she also be working for the secret service?*

I’ve bought a book with a transparent pen for Noah. When you write with it, you don’t see what you’ve written until you shine a light on it. Full of excitement, he sits at my desk to write in the book. Far too quickly, visiting time is over and I have to wave them out from behind the thick, heavy door. As always, I wave until they are out of sight.

I go back to my room and unlock the door with my key. I take the blue box and sit down on the bed. I open the blue box and study the little white book inside the box.

Sacred Symbols

The Cross is one of the hallowed symbols on Earth.

It is a powerful icon of human existence and universal love.

Before becoming the symbol of Christianity, it was a sacred,

Protective and decorative emblem in almost every culture

Throughout the world. The intersection of two paths,

A coordinate, the union of heaven and earth, spirit and matter,

The four directions, the four elements – earth, air, water, fire.

I post the photo on Facebook, accompanied by the first two lines from the booklet. My phone rings.

‘Mum here, can I come and see you tomorrow?’

‘Yes, that’s fine.’

‘Frans wants to come too, is that OK?’

Frans tried to poison me and works for the secret service.

‘Uhm... OK.’

The next day, before my mother and Frans arrive, I put on my purple necklace with the black cross, so that Christ is close to me. And the necklace will also protect me from evil. The cross feels extremely heavy. After supper at seven o’clock sharp, there’s a knock on my door.

‘Hello, here we are,’ says my mother as she pops her head around the door. Frans is standing behind her.

‘Hello,’ I mumble.

‘It’s good to see you again! I’ve brought you some fresh eggs from the chickens. And freshly squeezed orange juice. Would you like to drink that right away? Here you are,’ my mother says as she thrusts a plastic cup into my hand.

I bring the cup to my mouth and drink the orange juice in one go.

‘Thank you,’ I say as I give her back the cup and wipe my mouth.

‘Shall we go and sit in the living room for a while?’ my mother asks. Frans and I agree and take a seat at a round table in the living room.

‘Frans did fitness training in the open air today and worked in the garden, didn’t you Frans?’ says my mother cheerily.

‘Yes,’ Frans answers.

The cross is heavy. It radiates out to Frans. Christ takes him to account for his actions. It’s not for me to judge.

‘And I spoke to Famke this afternoon. She’s having a great time at work. She’s just won a major contract. She sends her regards.’

'Oh,' I mumble.

'So how are you doing these days?' Frans asks me.

Do your best and answer him, May-May, Wouter says to me via telepathy.

'Good, good,' I stammer as I get up. I walk back and forth.

'What did you eat today?' asks my mother. I sit down again.

'A vegetarian burger.'

'That's really nice, isn't it? That they take into account that you're a vegetarian. And fish, do you ever get fish?'

'No, no fish.'

The visiting hours are soon over and my mother and Frans go home again. I accompany them to the door. As we walk down the corridor of the hospital we see a wooden church pew.

'Let's sit here for a while,' says my mother. She takes a seat on the pew and her husband sits next to her.

Is this good, Christ? I ask Christ via telepathy.

Oh yes, ask if you can take a picture, he answers.

'Do you mind if I take a picture?' I ask.

'Not at all,' says my mother.

I quickly take a picture.

Then we walk through the corridor in the direction of the car park. I wave them out until they have driven through the barrier.

The day after their visit, my mother calls me.

'Hello, it's Mum here. Yesterday was nice and cosy!'

'Yes,' I answer.

It was really strange. When we got home yesterday the chickens were dead.'

Is that because of Frans' visit to me? Because I wore my cross?

'All of them?' I ask.

'Yes, all five of them. We don't understand it at all,' says my mother.

'Aunt Irina will be visiting you tonight,' she adds.

'OK,' I answer resignedly.

'We'll visit again soon. Goodbye,' she says, and hangs up.

This time, the idea of the secret service controlling me and the hearing of voices doesn't go away at once, but little by little. Sometimes I'm in the here and now, sometimes I'm propelled back into my own world.

That weekend, I find myself sitting in the living room. Bob has brought in *de Volkskrant* newspaper. An article in the supplement with the headline *Darwin's drama* catches my eye. It's accompanied by a picture of a blue-and-white butterfly. This blue-and-white butterfly looks a lot like the drawing I made in my Creative class! I take the article to the nurses. Bob is in the office.

'May-May, can I help you?' he asks with a smile.

'Yes, I'd like to discuss this article with you.'

'What does it say?'

'It's difficult to understand, but I think it means that according to Darwin's theory this species of butterfly cannot exist.

'Yes, so what?'

'In the Creative class, I drew a butterfly just like that.'

'Oh, can I see it?' I get up and fetch the drawing of the butterfly from my room.

'Look.'

‘Yes, they do look very similar.’

‘I think this is a sign that God exists. But I don't know exactly what part the secret service plays in all this. What do you think?’

‘Uh, I don't know either, May-May. I think it's best to discuss this with the psychiatrist.’

I walk out of the office, through the long white corridor to my room at the end.

Just before I get to my room, I see that the door to my new neighbour's room is open. I take a look inside. My neighbour is standing in the middle of the room scratching his thin, greasy hair. His room is a complete mess, there are clothes lying everywhere. He is short and skinny and his face is covered in red flaky spots.

‘Hello,’ I call out to him.

My neighbour doesn't reply.

I smell an enormous stench in the room. I don't say anything and go to my room. I find out later that my new neighbour's name is Martin. He has no friends or relatives at all.

Just before Christmas, on Friday December 20, I'm having breakfast with Martin, Tinie and Jack. Martin pours in milk, but he's shaking quite a bit and a splash of milk ends up next to his cup. Bob cleans it up for him. We don't say much. After we've put the breakfast things in the kitchen, Bob comes up to me: ‘Your sister will be here soon. And Jim van Os is coming to see you today.’

‘OK,’ I answer.

‘How exciting, Christ, Jim is coming today,’ I say aloud to Christ. I go to my room and take my purple necklace with the black cross out of the black velvet box and place it around my neck. Just as I'm wondering if I'm allowed to wear a religious symbol in a hospital, there's a knock on my door. It's my psychiatrist Michel, accompanied by Jim.

‘Do you mind if I wear this cross around my neck?’ I ask them cautiously, while giving them a hand.

‘Yes, if it makes you feel good,’ replies Jim.

I feel reassured and realise it was a good decision to ask Jim for mediation. The three of us walk to the meeting room. A junior doctor and two residents take a seat behind a mirror wall. My sister is waiting in the corridor. Michel, Jim and I sit down in the room.

‘So, May-May, how are you doing?’ Michel asks.

‘Oh, a bit better, I think the medication is working,’ I answer.

‘Really?’ Michel answers with interest.

‘Yes, it’s just so annoying that it has so many side effects.

‘Yes, what bothers you the most?’

‘It’s not so bad at the moment, I usually notice it after a while.’

Jim listens with interest. Michel continues: ‘Jim has come along too today, that’s what you wanted.’

‘Yes,’ I answer.

‘May-May, I’m curious to see how things have been going over time,’ Jim says. He walks up to a whiteboard and takes a black felt-tip pen.

‘In 2009 I had a severe psychosis. Then I was admitted for six months. First compulsorily and later voluntarily. In 2012 I was admitted for a fortnight and now I’ve been here for three months,’ I answer.

‘And now things are going better again,’ Jim adds.

In the meantime, he has drawn a black line on the board.

If you look here, you can see an upwards line,’ he proposes cautiously. I nod discreetly. I hadn’t looked at it that way up till now,

but Jim's right. I'm doing better than during my first compulsory admission.

'May-May, can you tell me what you're thinking?' Jim asks cautiously.

'Yes, you're probably having trouble with that part of the story. I think I'm being bugged by the secret service,' I murmur.

'And what else?' Jim asks with interest.

'Christ talks to me, he calls me Mary. That's what we found out in the clinic. At first I thought I was Eve and Aphrodite, but Ramona from Mars realised that I am also Mary.'

Michel looks at me in astonishment. He says nothing.

'OK,' says Jim.

'What do you think, should I keep taking the medication?' I ask Jim.

'I think it's good if you keep doing that for a while, after that you can always see if you can cut down again,' Jim continues.

OK, so Jim also wants me to take my medication. The realisation that – just like my doctor – Jim also thinks it's best for me to take medication makes a big impression on me.

'I can go along with that,' replies Michel.

Jim takes plenty of time for me, but it passes quickly.

'May-May, is there anything else you'd like to ask?' asks Michel.

'No thanks, everything was clear.'

The three of us get up and walk out of the meeting room. My sister arrives, and as always her presence reassures me. I open my cream-coloured handbag and take out the white envelope.

'Jim, there's something else I want to give you,' I say as we stand in the glass hallway by the stairwell.

I place a Christmas card in Jim's hand to wish him a Merry Christmas and because I am grateful that he has come all the way from Maastricht. Jim takes the card and smiles. My sister also shakes Jim's hand and goes home.

I walk back to the living room. The sofa, the TV, and the four round tables are a familiar sight. Tinie is arranging pink and white flowers in a vase. They look beautiful. From the wall cupboard I take a colouring picture of six horses standing in a circle. I look for the coloured pencils that I had bought myself and put in the cupboard. Unfortunately, I can't find them. So I make do with the coloured pencils in blue, yellow and brown. I colour the first horse brown and write down *Arabella*, the name of the much-loved horse that my sister and I were given by my parents. She went to the *eternal green pastures* at a young age after contracting navicular syndrome. It was something I felt guilty about for a very long time. I often used to dream about her, and then it was as if she was alive again. Until I woke up crying because it had just been a dream.

There's also an animal heaven now, isn't there, Christ?

Yes Mary, He answers immediately.

Martin walks into the room. He is restless and paces agitatedly back and forth. It gets on my nerves and makes me feel restless. But I carry on colouring.

I'm also in animal heaven.

Who are you then? I ask via telepathy.

The King of Orange the First's dog, the dog answers via telepathy.

I colour the horse blue and write alongside it: *The King of Orange's dog.*

At that very moment, Martin gives the table a hard slap with his hand. It scares the hell out of me. Martin mumbles to himself and starts walking back and forth.

'Martin, come with me for a moment,' says Bob.

'Solitary confinement,' mumbles Tinie.

I get up, put the coloured pencils back in the cupboard and go to my room. I take the colouring page with me.

Walking past Martin's room, I see that it's open and that it still stinks. I look for a nurse and bump into Madelon and Bob.

'I understand that Martin isn't here. Maybe you could wash his clothes? They smell a lot,' I say in an attempt to help Martin.

'Yes, Sister Klivia,' Madelon answers firmly.

I look at her questioningly. Who is Sister Klivia? Bob also looks at her questioningly and says what I think: 'Sister Klivia, what do you mean by that?' he asks.

'Well, how does it sound?' she asks.

'I don't know?' I answer.

'Like a Mother Superior,' she concludes.

She goes into Martin's room and picks up his clothes one by one. I watch her.

While I stand in front of Martin's room, Danny appears in the corridor. I recall the time he told me that he had threatened a woman with a knife, saying that it wasn't true.

I also thought that I wasn't psychotic, but that was true.

All of a sudden I become scared of Danny. I quickly close my door and lock myself in. Now that I'm on medication I suddenly no longer feel that I'm a panther with the secret service and I feel less that I'm Mary. What if my fellow patients do something to me? I remain in my room for several hours. When I sense that there is no one in the corridor, I go to the nurses' office.

'I want to talk to someone.'

'That's possible,' says Bob reassuringly. He remains seated while I stand in the doorway. Bob listens with interest.

'I'm afraid of my fellow patients.'

'Why?'

'I've come out of my psychosis and I realise that people who have been admitted here are a danger to themselves or to others.'

'Is there anyone in particular you're afraid of?'

'Yes, my neighbour. He said that you're saying he threatened a woman with a knife.'

Bob raises his eyebrows.

'Well. We can't say anything about other patients. We understand your concerns. If you want to stay in your room more often, that's fine, May-May,' says Bob.

'We'll see if you can be transferred to the open ward,' continues Madelon.

'And you like walking, don't you? There's a new intern here, she wouldn't mind spending time outside with you for a while.'

'Fine,' I answer gratefully.

A little later, Tinie, Jack and I are walking in the direction of the Groest, under the guidance of the intern. Her short ponytail rises and falls as she walks. In front of us I see the tower of the Sint Vituskerk. We're walking along the street full of magnificent villas where magnolias blossom every summer.

'And how are you feeling?' the intern asks me as we walk along.

'It's strange to be out of my psychosis.' The intern looks at me in a somewhat strange way.

'I'm out of my psychosis, didn't you know that?' I ask her in amazement.

'No, I didn't know that,' she answers honestly.

'How is that possible?' I wonder out loud.

'I've just returned from my holiday. I haven't had a handover yet.'

'Oh, OK, that's possible. Did you have a nice holiday?' I ask.

'Yes, I went to Spain.'

I don't ask her any more questions, I'm still too ill to be able to really empathise with someone else. I also feel it's a pity I can't share the unreal feeling I have of being back in the 'normal world' with someone. All those months I had been living in a second world that people sometimes had no idea about.

Silently we continue our way to the shopping centre and walk around until we're back in the yellow building of the Rembrandthof. I lock myself up in my room.

After a few days, my fear of my fellow patients fades away. On Christmas Eve, Danny asks me if I want to go to the Sint Vituskerk with him. I think it's rather unusual that he's asking me to go with him; we have 'fought' against each other in the past.

I'm no longer afraid of him and decide to go with him together with Jack. We walk towards the illuminated tower of the Sint Vituskerk. It's very busy in the big church. I look for 25 eurocents to buy a sheet of paper containing the liturgy of the Mass, but I can't find it. Danny and Jack don't have any money on them either. As we stand in the wooden pews, someone comes over to us and hands us a copy of the liturgy. I accept it gratefully.

Everyone is welcome in the church, even we, psychiatric patients, are part of it.

Soon the altar boys and the pastor enter in procession. An altar boy leads the way with the processional cross. He is flanked by two candle bearers. The deacon walks at the rear of the procession, holding a large Bible high above his head. The pastor wears a white robe, the colour appropriate for Christmas. They move forward, looking solemn. When they arrive at the altar, the pastor takes his place behind the pulpit. We start with a confession of guilt. Everyone seems to know the words by heart. I can't make out

exactly what is being said, but I am happy to apologise for what I have done wrong. Two readings are then followed by the Gospel according to Luke. This is the well-known story of Joseph going to Bethlehem with Mary.

This story is for you, Mary, says Christ affectionately to me. I feel good in His house. This is where I should be. The pastor starts his sermon with a joke about the ‘Christmas Mass’ and then tells the Christmas story with passion. Then comes the consecration. When the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, the pastor is silent for a few moments. He holds a chalice with hosts above his head in reverence and moves it slowly from one side to the other. I feel the proximity of Christ and I have the idea that everyone in the church feels it too. A young altar boy rings a bell three times. The priests come forward to hand out the consecrated hosts. I join the queue. The young acolyte handing out the hosts has dark hair and a pretty face. Like a sculpture that has come to life. I feel pious. I whisper softly that I haven’t had my first Communion. He traces the sign of the cross on my forehead with his fingers.

I love you, Mary, says Christ to me.

I go back to the pew and pray in silence for peace on earth, an end to hunger and diseases, and good health for everyone. Holy Communion is followed by the closing song, the sung blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

*The Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.*

Then everyone sings together:

Bless us and keep us.

Let your face shine on us and be gracious to us.

Bless us and keep us.

Let your face shine on us and give us peace.

I sing along with all my heart.

During the closing song, the altar boys, the acolytes, the deacon and the pastor walk out of the church in procession. They leave as solemnly as they came in. The people in the pews all sing along. When the procession passes their pews, they take a secretive look at the procession.

The instant the procession has left the church, a bell sounds, the Mass is over. People step out of the pews and kneel down in the aisle towards Jesus on the cross. Danny, Jack and I walk out of the church through the big door with the rest of the congregation. We return to the Rembrandthof.

‘It’s nice to start Christmas like this, don’t you think?’ says Danny.

‘Definitely,’ Jack and I agree. The Mass has left a deep impression on me.

After breakfast on Christmas Day, we go for a walk with a group of patients. Apparently Martin is out of solitary confinement – perhaps just for a while. He’s also part of the group, just like Tinie and Jack. Bob accompanies us. I take my phone with me to take pictures. On the way back, as we walk past the Sint Vituskerk, I ask: ‘Can we stop here for a moment? I want to take a picture of Sint Vitus.’

‘I think you take a picture every time we pass by here,’ Bob answers with a wink.

‘Oh, please. It’s Christmas Day.’

‘OK, you win!’

We approach the church from behind and I decide it would be nice to have some trees on the photo as well. The moss-covered branches in the foreground give the composition a distinct effect.

‘Maybe you can take another step to the side,’ says Martin, grabbing my arm. I do as he suggests. I hold my breath for a

moment when I smell the pungent odour of his sweat. Then I take the photo. Martin walks up to Bob.

‘I helped May-May take the photo.’

‘That’s great Martin, that’s great,’ says Bob with a smile.

We continue, passing King’s ice cream café on the way.

A little later we’re back at the Rembrandthof. I’m sitting on the couch when Martin approaches me. His jumper falls loosely over his black jeans and there are white stains on it.

‘May I see the pictures you took?’ Martin asks.

‘Yes, fine,’ I answer as I pick up my phone.

Martin and I look at the photos together.

‘Look, I think that photo has turned out really beautifully,’ he says, referring to the photo of the Sint Vituskerk with the composition of trees, which he helped me take.

‘Really?’ I answer casually.

As soon as we have looked at all the photos Martin gets up and shuffles to his room. I can hear him shouting in the corridor.

I go up to the nurse and ask if I can leave the Rembrandthof for a while. In the shopping street I order the picture that Martin likes. I also buy a matching wooden frame. I open the wooden frame cautiously and place the photo on the glass. Then I close the frame again. Excited, I walk back to the clinic.

When I get back to the Rembrandthof, I walk up to the nurses’ office. Madelon is sitting at her desk. As I stand in the doorway, she looks up from her computer.

‘May-May, you’re doing well. I think it would be a good idea to talk to your doctor soon about your transfer to the open ward.’

‘That’s good news,’ I answer enthusiastically. I continue: ‘I’ve brought something for Martin. Where is he?’

'Martin's gone away'

'Has he left the ward?'

'No, he hasn't. He'll be back in a while.'

I go to the living room. Jack's there too.

'Do you know where Martin is?' I ask him.

'He's in solitary,' he answers.

Then I go back to the nurses' office. The door is still open.

'Could you please give this present to Martin when you see him?' I ask Madelon gently. She takes the present from me.

'Fine,' she answers. She carefully places the present on the corner of her desk. As I walk back to my room, I smile to myself. I try to imagine Martin's face when he comes out of solitary confinement and sees 'his' picture in a frame.

EPILOGUE

On the evening of Christmas Day, Noah, my mother, Famke, Walter and I went out for dinner in a restaurant near the Rembrandthof. Noah enjoyed it and he understood that my discharge from the hospital was imminent. During my later short-term and voluntary admissions to the Rembrandthof, we repeated the ritual of eating out at the end of my period of admission, and this became a tradition for celebrating that Mummy was better again.

As for my second compulsory admission, which I describe in this book, I stayed in the open ward for another month. That's where Martin van 't Klooster came to see me. During my admission, we discussed the role of the media in the context of stigmatisation and destigmatisation. That helped me a lot. Writing contributed to my recovery. It was also nice to collaborate with someone again and to have discussions about ideas, about things I was doing before I became ill. In the blog I wrote on this topic for *PsychoseNet*, I compare this to having a broken knee. In order to get the knee to function again, you strengthen the muscles around it. I did this by re-activating my strong points.

After the admission that I describe in *Here I Am*, I was assigned another psychiatrist. She wanted to prescribe how much

medication I had to take. I didn't really feel that she was open to listening to me about the side effects of medication. Upon her retirement, I was assigned a new psychiatrist. Together with her, we are looking for an optimal dosage of the medication, balancing between just enough medication for me not to become ill again, and as little medication as possible so that I don't suffer too much from the side effects. This contributes very much to my recovery. Additionally, I'm now taking an antipsychotic that contributes less to depression. However, I still find it difficult to get up in the mornings, I have less energy than before, and I still suffer from weight gain compared to the period before my psychosis. I have also had four more psychoses since my second compulsory admission in 2013-2014. During one psychosis, I stayed at home, and for the other three I voluntarily admitted myself to the Rembrandthof. However, those stays lasted considerably shorter (around one to two weeks), because in all those cases I cooperated immediately with the psychiatrists and increased my antipsychotic. It looks as if my treatment at the Rembrandthof will be over in the beginning of 2021.

What helps me to prevent a psychosis is: not planning too many appointments on one day, taking care of my son, socialising with friends, jogging and walking in nature, and getting enough rest. Being aware of my boundaries is important to me. I have also developed spiritually, which I will talk about more below.

Something else that has helped me to recover is not using my diagnosis to describe myself, but to say that I am vulnerable for psychoses and mania. An eye-opener for me was the book *A Road Back from Schizophrenia* by Arnhild Lauveng. In it she states that the diagnosis that people are given can determine the extent to which they function. She paraphrases the book *The Making of Blind Men* by Robert Scott (1963), who researched the socialisation of adults. Blindness is seen as a stigma that is accompanied by prejudice on the part of other people. Scott indicates that if people were classified as being 'blind' (with ten percent sight or less) they ended up on social welfare benefits, while with more than ten percent

sight they would be classified as 'sighted with a visual impairment'. In the latter case, people were stimulated much more to participate in society. The label given to people has an impact on how they are treated by specialists, family members and friends. After reading this, I decided to describe my state of mental health as: *a vulnerability for psychoses and mania*.

What also aided my recovery was actually acting on what I experienced as my mission during my first forced admission; I believed that my mission was to bring about peace. So, together with others, I founded the peace organisation Peace SOS. Peace SOS undertakes various activities, such as supporting local peace organisations, visiting embassies of countries involved in wars, organising peace events, and encouraging others to write blogs for the Peace SOS website. Topics include initiatives to promote peace through peaceful methods and relieving famine worldwide.

To help other people who are psychologically vulnerable, I work as a patient expert in the Psychiatric Department at the UMC Utrecht, although I stopped doing this during the corona period. I also make vlogs and have written blogs for PsychoseNet (www.psychosenet.nl) and articles for Schizophrenia Bulletin of Oxford University Press, in collaboration with Jim van Os and others. In my opinion, the most important thing that psychiatrists and social nurses can do is provide loving care and sincerely try to make contact with individuals in a mental crisis.

Noah is now fourteen years old and goes to secondary school. He lives with his father one week and with me the next. I'm always open towards him, in everything, even about my illness. From an early age, I offered him explanations in simple language. In this book the focus is mainly on my 'sick period', so that the wonderful moments we had together are less evident. The summer in 2019 was a milestone for me – we snorkelled together on Crete. It was wonderful seeing all those amazing fish. Mind you, the cosy ordinary 'weekday' moments might well be the ones I cherish the most. My relationship with Vince and Sylvia has been good for a

long time. Fortunately. That's very important for Noah. My faith in Christ has helped me with this.

My sister, parents and their partners are also doing well. We see each other regularly and still have a close bond. Through my work for Peace SOS, I also meet a lot of inspiring people who are striving for peace and doing their best to achieve it. I met Arianne in the gym and we have become good friends. I sometimes work with her at Seats2Meet in Amersfoort, even though I've been working a lot at home since the coronavirus. As a result of my admission and through my previous book *Inner Voices*, I have met a lot of people who also have a connection with God. At the book launch of the Dutch version of *Inner Voices*, I met Petros. We have become friends and he has encouraged me to, among other things, exhibit my artistic work, such as the photographs I took during my compulsory admission. I also often go on fun days out with Irma, I occasionally see my friend Saskia, who has just moved with her family from Madagascar via La Reunion to France. A dear childhood friend from the 'girl group' I grew up with and with whom I was still in contact unfortunately passed away in the summer of 2020. I regularly go for a drink with Tygo in Hilversum, when we talk about the developments in the world. Fortunately, Valerie is still alive and has two children. Furthermore, I have more dear friends and girlfriends who don't all wish to be named here. Additionally, after my admission I became ashamed of a lot of tweets I had posted during my psychoses. Unfortunately, I deleted them, which I now regret.

Finally, to conclude this book, I would like to draw attention to the spiritual side of psychoses. During my psychosis, Christ said to me: *Be open about your psychic vulnerability and come to My home*. I have done both. I have had several conversations with the pastor. These conversations and attending the holy Masses were also a way for me to investigate what was right about my psychoses and what was less important or not right. In one of our exchanges on PsychoseNet, Jim van Os refers to this process that followed my psychoses as: learning and calibrating. Sometimes something

would resonate so strongly during a Mass that tears spontaneously ran down my cheeks. Like striving for world peace. Another fine aspect of the church is that before taking a host you wish peace to the persons sitting close to you. It doesn't matter if you're the director of a large company or if you sell the newspaper for the homeless. Everyone belongs. During one of our conversations, I asked the pastor if we could also pray for Christ himself. 'That's not usual,' he said, but I do it myself sometimes. I love Him and I tell Him that too. In 2017 I did my first Holy Communion on Holy Thursday and on Ascension Day my Holy Confirmation in the Sint Vituskerk. I considered my first Holy Communion as my marriage to Christ. Just before I did Communion, a big man with a huge bunch of flowers in his arms came into the church mumbling audibly during the climax of the Mass. Two people from the church tried to eject him. Christ asked me to walk up to the man. I did as he told me and walked up to the man and said from the bottom of my heart: 'You are always welcome in the House of Christ.' The man said that he had come to give a bunch of flowers to a woman, but he did not know to which woman. I repeated that he was welcome. The man looked at me and said, 'I give the flowers to you.' That's what he did and then walked out of the church. I looked at the large bunch of orange roses supplemented with *gypsophila*. A bright red helium-filled heart-shaped balloon rose out of the middle of the bunch of flowers. For me it was as if the flowers had come from Christ. After Mass, a woman sitting in the pew behind me, who had witnessed it all, gave me a Miraculous Medal with the image of Mary because she thought it was brave of me to approach the man. I later bought a gold necklace to go with it and I now wear it when I want to celebrate my love for Christ.

I feel that the Sint Vituskerk is indeed the House of Christ, even though I haven't been there since the coronavirus. Being in church or in nature makes me feel good. During a holy Mass, the priest encouraged people to say that God is in you. And that is how I feel. I still talk to Christ, in some periods more often than in others. Furthermore, based on my psychoses, but also through those

conversations, I have the idea that all religions pursue in essence the same thing: world peace, charity, an end to hunger and illness, and a life in harmony with nature.

Eva Ouwehand obtained her PhD in 2020 on the topic of the religious experiences of people with bipolar disorder. She indicates that in mental health care, religious experiences are often seen as part of the disease, whereas people who have these experiences also look for the religious significance of it in their lives. Her research shows that more than 60% of the quantitative research group see themselves as religious and/or spiritual. In the general population, this figure is 31%. A possible explanation that Eva Ouwehand gives for this is that the religious search after a manic episode, in which someone has had religious experiences, leads to more religious involvement. Her research also shows that 42 percent of the respondents interpreted the experiences as 'both religious and pathological,' 46 percent saw the experiences as part of his or her spiritual development, and 15 percent as exclusively related to the disease.

To be honest, it sometimes saddens me when I read that in mental health care religious experiences are seen as part of the pathology. I get the feeling that this is also a value judgement of me as a person and a rejection of my contact with God. Somehow, I also want to 'belong' and not be seen as being ill, although I certainly acknowledge that I have a vulnerability for psychoses and manic episodes, and that when I am psychotic, I am also predominantly ill. Incidentally, my own psychiatrist formulates it more diplomatically. She states that all my decompensations have gone into complete remission and she indicates that when I talk to God through feeling my ear, that that is: 'A strange piece of the puzzle.' However, they, and my former social-psychiatric nurse, think that my contact with God contributes to my functioning. But I think it is more important to get His message across. That is why I also welcome Jim van Os' statement that some people can consult sources that are outside the regular consciousness. I hope that people like him and Eva Ouwehand can build a bridge between

people whose religious experiences are meaningful and between a section of Western psychiatry that pathologizes those experiences. And there are more bright spots. Robin Timmers (2018), for example, provides extensive insight into how to deal with the phenomenon of hearing voices. He also gives examples of well-known people in history who heard voices. Such as: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, the founders of the Mormons and the Quakers, Martin Luther King and Joan of Arc. He also describes the hearing of voices within different religions.

Vincent Sjoerd Swierstra wrote the book *The Magician*. He had several spiritual experiences during his psychosis in 2005 and considers these as part of his spiritual development. Three years ago, Vincent had a relapse during which he had no spiritual experiences. In a video conversation I had with Vincent, he warned that spirituality can also provoke a psychosis in some people who are vulnerable for psychoses. I recognise this. During my follow-up admission in the open clinic, I received a beautiful gift with a statue depicting Mary and the baby Jesus. At that time I thought I was receiving it because I was Mary, and I temporarily relapsed into my psychosis again. Additionally, as I described in *Inner Voices*, some people have the feeling that they are the devil, or that there is a voice in their heads that makes them execute evil assignments (*Nieuwsuur*, 25 May 2019). The question must also be asked concerning how best they can be helped.

In the documentary *Crazywise*, which compares the treatment of psychotic people in Western psychiatry with their treatment in indigenous cultures, filmmaker Phil Borges also offers a different perspective on psychoses. People from indigenous cultures consider it a blessing for the whole community when someone becomes psychotic, because that person can later assume the role of healer for example. Furthermore, the concept of 'neurodiversity' offers hope – perhaps it helps people to be open to what those individuals vulnerable for psychoses wish to make a topic of discussion. In addition it is important to realize that there are also people who meet God, without going through a mental crisis. Pearl

Stryders, for example, had a vision from God. This inspired her to start a soup kitchen *Under His Wings* for children in the township of Sir Lowry's Pass, South Africa. I believe that God reaches out to those in need, although this may not always be the case. He inspires people to help others. God is love. He reveals himself in all religions and loves everyone.

I see it as my calling to spread God's message to the world. Especially now that it is one hundred seconds before midnight on the Doomsday Clock of *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, where midnight symbolises the end of mankind.

It is all about the message of love, to love everything that lives and to love your neighbour. Now really is the time for world peace. Time for an end to hunger and child mortality and a ban on nuclear weapons and killer robots. Time to live in harmony with nature. We must stand up for those who are most vulnerable. With all of us, and with God's help, we will succeed. Let us spread His message of love. Towards *A World Where All Children Can Play*.

NOTES

- 1: The names of May-May, Niels, Saskia, Thea, Arianne, Hans, Marjan, Mina, Petros, Pieter, Sjoerd, Martin van 't Klooster, Jim van Os, Aartjan Beekman, Father Dresmé, Bert Koenders, Wouter Bos, Ronald Plasterk and Pearl Stryders are the real names of the persons concerned, all other names are fictitious.
2. Aartjan Beekman indicated that in the telephone conversation he had said that he was not a friend of Wouter Bos but a colleague.
3. Elyn Saks is first and foremost Professor of Law, although she holds a joint position in the Psychiatry department.

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FOR CHRIST: LOVE

When a child's happy smile makes my skin tingle,
When a puppy looks at me with its playful eyes,
When a flower touches me with its germinating beauty,
Like two older people scarred by time lovingly walking hand in hand,
When a mother embraces her child,
When a passer-by helps a homeless person,
When a nurse gently touches a patient's forehead,
When lovers look at each other full of passion,
Then I feel love. Love comes in many shapes and forms.
It is the most beautiful thing God has ever given us.

May-May, April 8, 2017

PHOTOS



Photo of the Sint Vituskerk



The Sint Vituskerk viewed from the closed patio



In my room at the Rembrandthof



Borne by the white light



The rose that Christ showed me in the patio of the closed ward of the Rembrandthof

